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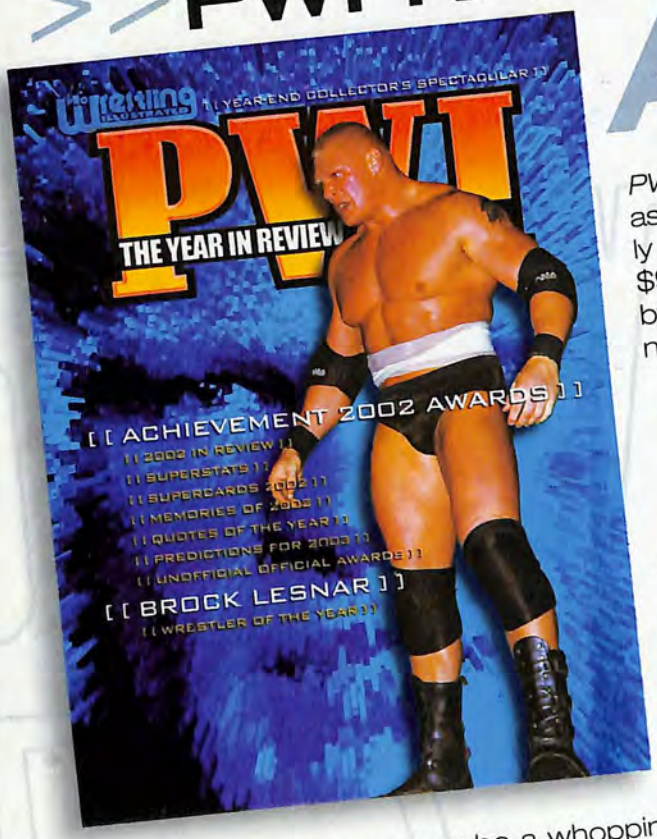
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from the desk of...

IT'S EASY TO write off Ole Anderson as a bitter ex-wrestler. The man looks around now and sees a business whose survival he was certain depended on keeping the public in the dark about its most precious secrets now proudly proclaim itself an act. He sees men leaping around and over the ring who have no understanding of the subtleties of their craft. He sees owners who consider themselves so far above what he did so well for so long that they won't even deign to call their product professional wrestling.

Some will say it was that bitterness that drove him, along with author Scott Teal, to write the book *Inside Out: How Corporate America Destroyed Professional Wrestling* (Crowbar Press, www.1wrestlinglegends.com, $19.95). I'm not so sure. I think the reason Anderson and Teal devoted so much time to this project was that Ole had a burning passion in his gut for this business that was now scorching his insides. For Anderson, writing *Inside Out* was cathartic, a release of the ill feelings he has for more people than most of us will meet in a lifetime.

The book gives us a glimpse into not only the inner workings of pro wrestling, but the inner workings of a man who did just about everything there is to do in this business, inside the ring and out. He is a man who had little use for anybody who didn't see things as he did. Ole was right about everything; just ask him. He did things his way, even though he is not necessarily proud of his methods (he readily calls himself an asshole).

Above all, Anderson despises the direction the business took as "Corporate America," Vince McMahon's WWF and Ted Turner's WCW, battled for control. McMahon tried to change the way the world looks at professional wrestling, even going so far as to force feed us the term "sports entertainment." And the "Suits" at Turner Broadcasting fell all over each other trying to copy his formula for success. Never, Anderson laments, was the long-term health of the sport given a second thought.

Bitter? Maybe. But not entirely wrong, either. Consider a recent meeting Vince McMahon held with his wrestlers in which he stressed a need to slow the pace of their matches to allow the "high spots" to be more meaningful—and believable. He wants the wrestlers to be more attentive to the commands of the referee, to create a sense of order in the ring. He wants his highly paid superstars to spend more time on the mat than in therapy recovering from surgery. He wants rivals to travel separately and not be seen together socially. While not exactly bringing the sport back to the Ole Anderson era, McMahon is starting to recognize that there is a reason the business of wrestling was able to sustain itself for all those years before he changed the rules.

I came away from reading *Inside Out* with very mixed feelings about Ole Anderson. He does not come off as a particularly nice man. He's crude and sadistic and pigheaded. But he's honest, brutally so. And after spending all those years in a business in which honesty was against the law, he's ready to talk (382 pages worth) if you're willing to listen.

And for as much as he detests Vince McMahon and what he has turned his beloved sport into, I think he'd be a happy man if what he has to say can have even a slightly positive impact on the future of this business.

Stu Saks
Publisher

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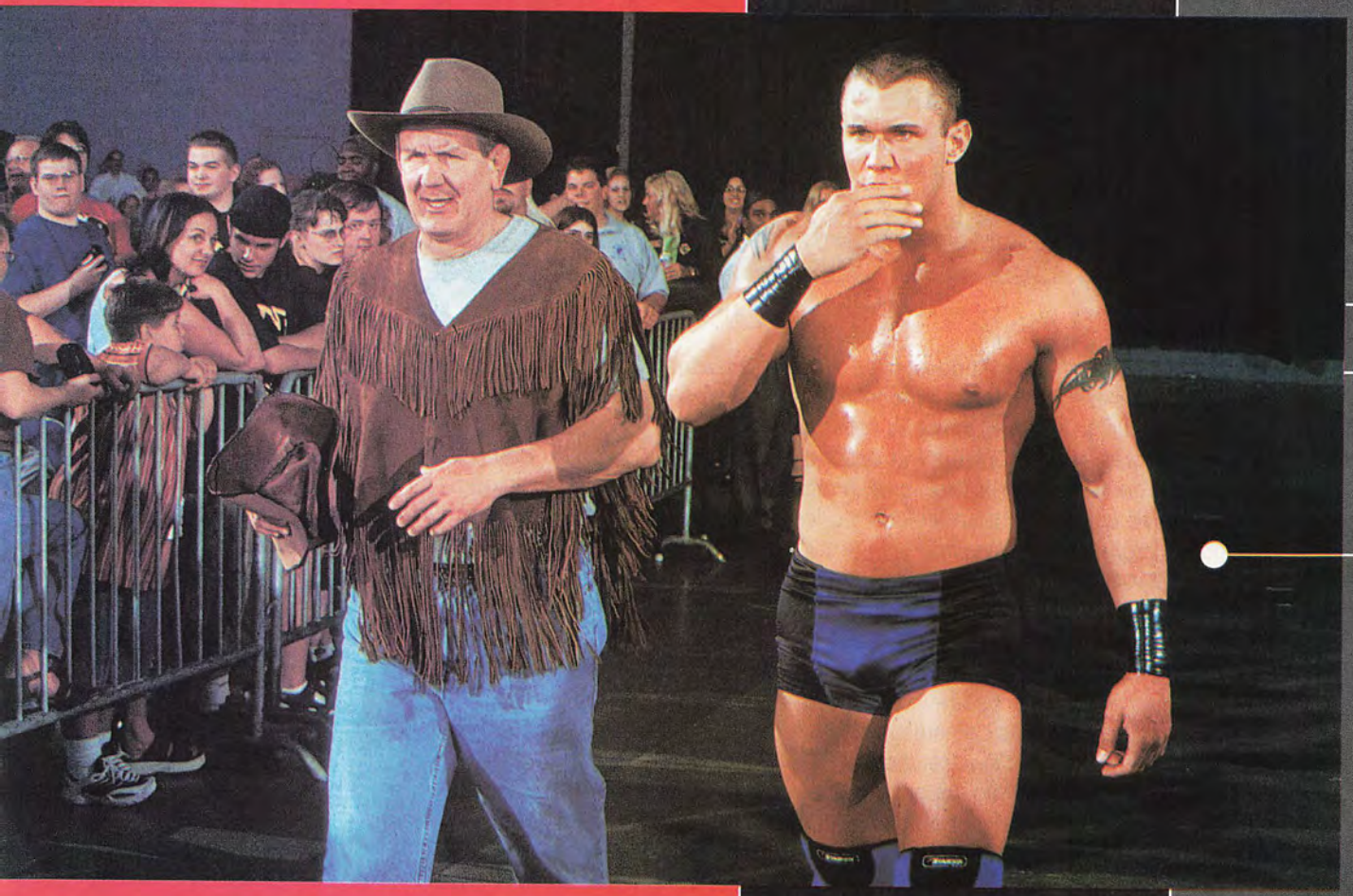

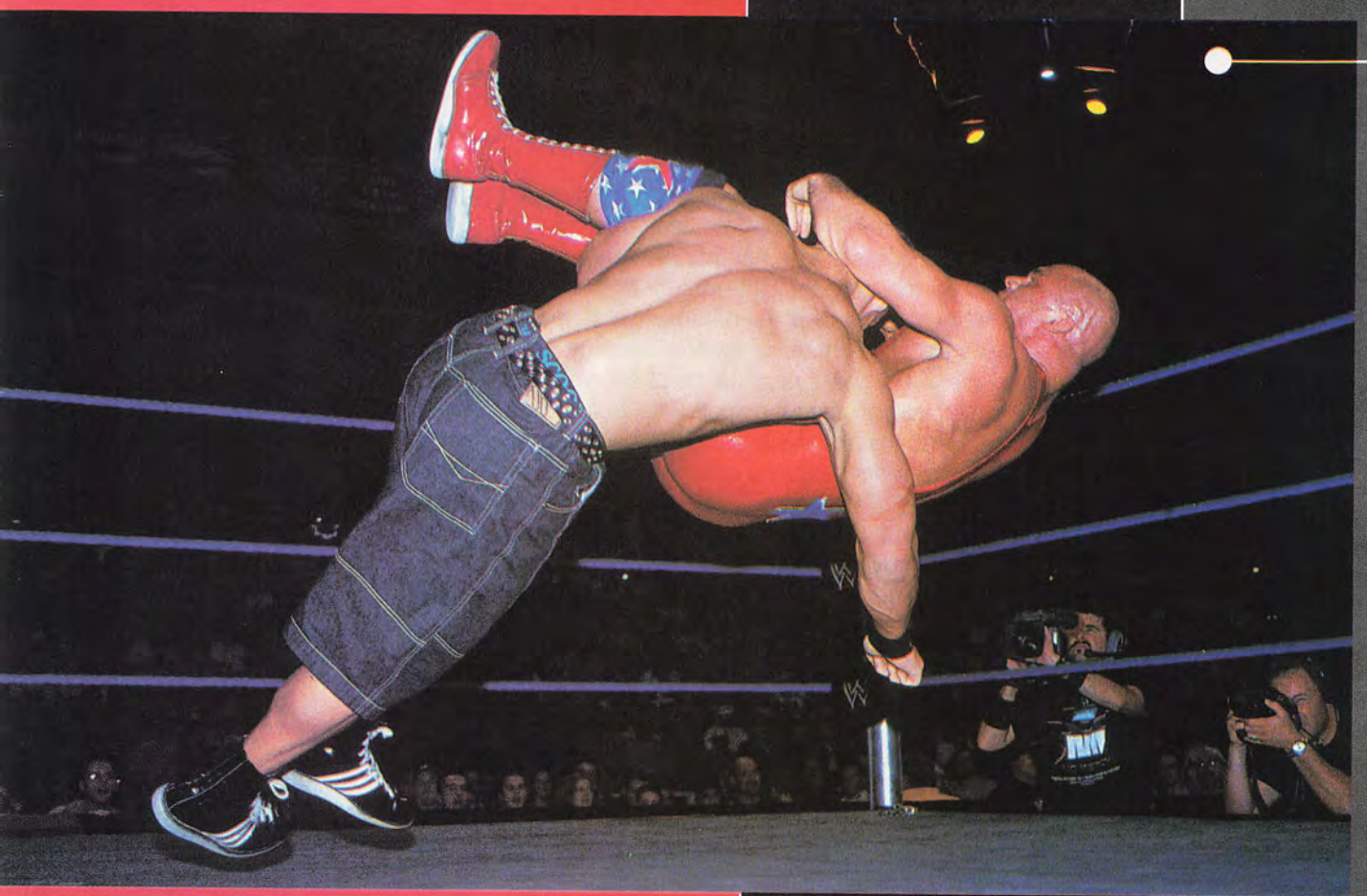

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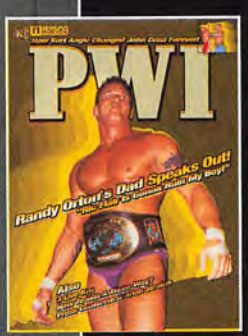

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Edge (WWEJ0303)	$15.00 each
Rikishi (WWEJ0304)	$15.00 each
D-Von Dudley (WWEJ0305)	$15.00 each
Kurt Angle (WWEJ0311)	$15.00 each
Billy Gunn (WWEJ0314)	$15.00 each
Chuck Palumbo (WWEJ0315)	$15.00 each
Tajiri (WWEJ0327)	$15.00 each
Chris Jericho (WWEJ0337)	$15.00 each
Lance Storm (WWEJ0340)	$15.00 each
Al Snow (WWEJ0341)	$15.00 each
Albert (WWEJ0343)	$15.00 each

Raw™ Draft Series 1

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Kane (WWEJ0201)	$15.00 each
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Booker T (WWEJ0203)	$15.00 each
Big Show (WWEJ0204)	$15.00 each
Bubba Ray Dudley (WWEJ0205)	$15.00 each
Kevin Nash (WWEJ0211)	$15.00 each
William Regal (WWEJ0217)	$15.00 each
Jeff Hardy (WWEJ0218)	$15.00 each
X-Pac (WWEJ0221)	$15.00 each
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- Undertaker Belt (WWEBELT06)
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- Tag Team Championship Belt (WWEBELT10)
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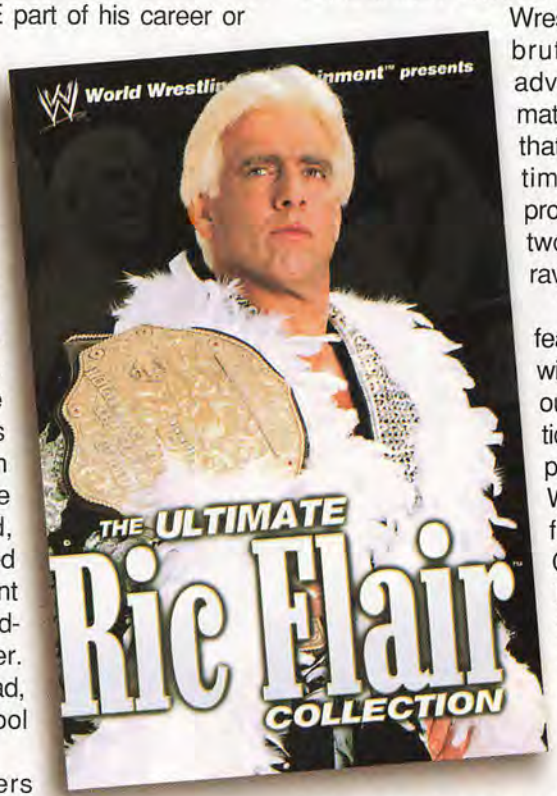
before the bell

Compiled by Will Welsh

For The Ultimate Flair Fan

Ric Flair. His name practically *means* wrestling. No other wrestler has been so beloved for so long. The people who put together *The Ultimate Ric Flair Collection* knew this, and that excited them. But it didn't help answer their most pressing question: How were they going to document an acclaimed 30-year career? Wrestling fans are sticklers for detail, and if the collection focused too much on the WWE part of his career or just didn't meet expectations, word would get out in a hurry.

Guess what! Sales figures have been astounding.



The three-DVD collection is comprehensive, covering most of Flair's career quite nicely. It begins with his Starrcade '83 match against Harley Race, in which he won his second NWA World championship. It's funny: Despite being recognized as one of the greatest wrestlers of his era, Race might never have been given the opportunity to headline today. His big hair and beard, cheap-looking robe, and bar-bred physique would probably prevent him from becoming a strong mid-carder, let alone a main-eventer. That doesn't make this match bad, though, just different. Old school fans will really appreciate it.

From there, the DVD covers Flair's long-running feud with Dusty Rhodes. Some of today's fans may see Rhodes as an overweight legend whose legacy would be best served by sitting at home instead of still wrestling at age 57, and maybe there's some validity to that. But Flair vs. Rhodes from Starrcade '85 is a great match from their collection of great matches. Rhodes may have been a big man, but he was an agile, charismatic big man. In his heyday, he was magically entertaining, and *The Ultimate Ric Flair Collection* captures that side of him extremely well.

Barry Windham's inclusion in the three-DVD set might surprise some fans—even some long-time fans who have forgotten how talented Windham was in his prime. As Flair says on the DVD, "He was the only guy who could go hold-for-hold, move-for-move, drink-for-drink, and woman-for-woman with me." Their 60-minute draw from 1987 wouldn't look odd on top of a WWE card today.

All things above aside, the best part of the DVD collection is the extended look at Flair's legendary feud with Rick Steamboat, complete with two sensational matches, one from Clash of the Champions VI, the other from WrestleWar '89. If you want to watch brutally physical, technically advanced matches, these are the matches for you. If you weren't sure that Steamboat was one of the all-time great wrestlers before, you probably will be after watching these two matches and listening to Flair rave about his wrestling.

The rest of the DVD collection features segments on Flair's feuds with Terry Funk (perhaps the most out-of-place addition to the collection) and Sting (oddly enough, the producers decided to feature their WCW World-international title unification match from Clash of the Champions XXVII instead of their heralded 45-minute draw from the first Clash of the Champions), and his run with the old WWF (looking back, it's amazing to see how out of place he was in that character-driven atmosphere) and today's WWE. There are also a bunch of extras, including Flair receiving *PWI's* Wrestler of the Decade Award for the 1980s.

For the serious wrestling fan, *The Ultimate Ric Flair Collection* isn't a rental—it's a must-own. A perfect five suplexes out of five.

Talkin' Trash

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related things you've been talking about lately, and our gut reaction to each.

10. Evolution wins every Raw title at Armageddon. Well, Evolution won every Raw championship except one—the women's championship. If we were brave, we could make a ton of unseemly jokes, but we're not brave. Not at all.

9. C.M. Punk and Julio Dinero turn against Raven in TNA. Okay, this was kind of a big deal, but we disagree with TNA announcer Mike Tenay. In no way—in no way whatsoever—did this little hiccup "destroy Raven's destiny." Face it, Mr. Tenay, that was a stretch.

8. Los Guerreros split again. Do you smell it? We do. Finally, Vince can bring out one of his big guns from the WCW purchase: the Latino World Order!

7. John Cena turns fan favorite and becomes one of the most popular wrestlers on the Smackdown roster. Ron "The Truth" Killings just threw his copy of this magazine in the trash.

6. Bill Goldberg's 30-day suspension from WWE. That Eric Bischoff is so darn devious. Who knows, maybe he'll follow in Vince McMahon's footsteps and run his own wrestling company one day!

5. NWA-TNA in programming talks with Chicago-based superstation WGN. Do you think that the WGN folks are aware that TNA's foremost representative, Jeff Jarrett, was once best known as "Slapnuts"? Nah, we didn't think so, either.

4. Stacy Keibler is freed from her enslavement to Test and Scott Steiner by Mick Foley. We're very happy for the former Miss Hancock, so much so that we want to celebrate. It's picture time!

3. "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin becomes the Raw sheriff. Let's hope that he consulted everyone's favorite law dog, Big Bossman, before taking the position.

2. Smackdown in Iraq. Vince McMahon's mantra the entire time: "Don't let Bradshaw near the guns. Don't let Bradshaw near the guns. Don't let Bradshaw near the guns ..."

1. Chris Jericho and Trish Stratus. Those black and white checkered stretch pants must really attract the ladies.

The Internet Insider

The following news items were culled from various wrestling-related Web sites—or were they? See if you can pick out the items that were actually reported on the Internet (which doesn't necessarily mean that they are true) and the ones we blatantly made up. The answers appear at the end of this column on page 11.

1. Rey Misterio Jr. replica masks are selling for $100 at WWE events. Meanwhile, they sell for less than $10 in Mexico. Basically, you could buy a round trip plane ticket from one of quite a few American cities to Mexico City and buy three Misterio masks south of the border and still have money left over relative to the cost of buying three Rey-Rey masks at a WWE show.

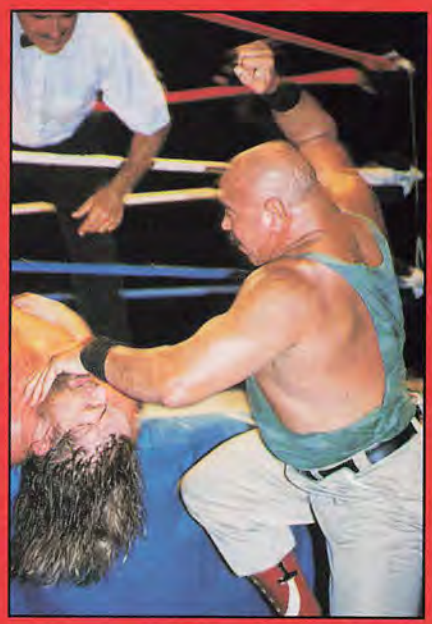
2. WWE is so conscientious, for legal reasons, of the old WW*F* Attitude logo showing up on TV that a WWE worker recently bribed a fan with the logo visible on a do-rag he was wearing to take it off in exchange for a Brock Lesnar autographed photo. The fan was in the third row directly behind Michael Cole and Tazz.

3. One of Vince Russo's most passionate conversations with NWA-TNA President Dixie Carter right before he was ousted from the booking position in favor of Dutch Mantel (which was done in part in order to please Hulk Hogan, who didn't want to work with Russo again) was one that saw him insist that she was being worked by Hogan. He predicted every move Hogan has made so far and told her that Hogan is going to do what's best for Hogan at any given time without regard for what he has said he would do in the past.

4. As lot of Hulk Hogan's focus has now shifted away from himself and his wrestling career and toward his 15-year-old daughter, Brooke, and her singing career. Lou Pearlman, who was the force behind the creation of N'Sync and The Backstreet Boys, is really behind Brooke and sees a tremendous marketing opportunity with her. She will be marketed as Brooke Hogan, not under her real name, Brooke Bollea, because they do plan to publicize and take advantage of the fact that she is the daughter of Hulk Hogan.

This Month in Wrestling History

May



May 4, 1931: Wrestling's already fragmented World heavyweight championship undergoes further distress after a controversial finish in the Henri DeGlane vs. Ed "Strangler" Lewis match in Montreal. DeGlane claims to have been bitten by Lewis, and the referee agrees and awards the match and the title to DeGlane. Lewis denies committing the foul and asserts that DeGlane bit himself to get a cheap win. As a result, DeGlane is recognized as champion in parts of New England and Canada, while Lewis is recognized in states such as California and Illinois. (Now we know where Eddie Guerrero got the inspiration for his current "lie, cheat, and steal" gimmick! What a historian!)

May 21, 1933: Joe Savoldi marries Miss Lola Poole in Buchanan, Michigan. (Yup, you guessed it—another crucial historical entry that was found in an early edition of *The Wrestling Almanac And Book Of Facts.)*

May 24, 1940: Richard Smith, 28, described as a WPA worker from Pleasant Green, Missouri, dies after being in a Pilot Grove, Missouri, ring for three minutes with Dale (Swede) Hanson, a wrestler traveling with a carnival. The Associated Press reports, "Hanson gripped Smith around the neck and applied a tight squeeze. When Hanson released the hold, Smith slumped to the ring floor and died. J.C. Tincher, Cooper County coroner, said no inquest would be held, as the accident appeared to be 'unavoidable.'" (It's true, it's true. There's nothing more unavoidable than killing a man by gripping him around the neck and applying a tight squeeze. Darn unavoidable, that kind of thing.)

May 26, 1987: Bitter in-ring rivals Hacksaw Duggan and The Iron Sheik are arrested by New Jersey State Police while traveling together. Duggan is charged with possession of marijuana and drinking alcohol while driving; Sheik is charged with possession of cocaine and marijuana. Duggan receives a conditional discharge; Sheik receives one year of probation. (*Hoooooo!* How do you think they explained that one to Mr. McMahon?)

May 5, 1995: An ECW show in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is almost canceled by building security when it confiscates two boxes full of frying pans, cookie trays, and other weapons from fans. (Frying pans and cookie trays? What's wrong with frying pans and cookie trays? ECW officials must have forgotten to mention that immediately after the matches, they were holding a bake-off, with all proceeds going to charity. Yeah, that had to be it.)

We Heard That!

"That's not even close. I don't know where they came up with that. I'm hoping to be back on a full schedule in mid-January. I don't know where that came from, but that's not in the plans. I'm coming back full-schedule."

—Kurt Angle, refuting Internet reports stating that his neck problems would force him to work a less-demanding schedule from now on, in an interview with wwe.com

"Wrestling is my priority, but I'm being realistic about [my] career, about injuries, about all the things that go along with this industry. Also, for me, I've been on the show, featured a lot. It wouldn't be a bad thing for me to be gone for a little bit. Not that I want to. It's hard for me. It's a really tough decision for me. I was just gone for two weeks making the film, and I missed being around the business. When I was getting ready to go to [Armageddon], I was saying, 'I can't wait to get there. I miss it.'"

—Triple-H, talking about how he balances his love for making movies and his love for wrestling, in an interview with wwe.com

"*Survivor* is basically a game of faces and heels. As far as TV time is concerned, cutting heel promos guaranteed me more air time than anyone else. As far as strategy in the game, good backstage workers like Triple-H were definitely inspirational in how to manipulate others and get the things that you want."

—*Survivor: Pearl Islands* contestant Johnny Fairplay (a former wrestling promoter), during an interview with the *Pro Wrestling Torch*

"It's funny I always joke that wrestling is only fake when you lose. It's a dig on the boys because we often brag about our title reigns and accomplishments, but whenever we are on a losing streak always point out that ... losing is no big deal. The Internet is viewed in a similar light. If we are being praised for having the best match, we seem to give you guys a lot of credence, yet, oddly enough, if you bury us, you're a bunch of dumb marks who have never taken a bump and don't know what you're talking about. I think sometimes we all take things a little too seriously. Wow, I can't believe I just said that."

—Lance Storm, answering a question about what other wrestlers think of the Internet, on his official Web site, www.stormwrestling.com

"My injuries haven't fully healed, so I would like to fight someone hurt."

—Japanese star Kazushi Sakuraba, showing great intelligence, as quoted by wrestlingobserver.com

January's Best

"What the hell did Vince put in that taco?"
—Henry Nicolai, Tucson, AZ

"What did you say, Mr. Turnbuckle? Yeah, I think 'Macho Man's' CD sucks, too."
—Kene Chinweze, Austin, TX

caption me!

Think you're a better writer than the editors at *PWI?* Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This 1998 WCW photo of Hulk Hogan getting in the face of The Big Show (then The Giant) needs a short, concise, and downright uproarious caption. If you think you're up to the task, e-mail your zany quips to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com, or slap a stamp on an envelope and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!" Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Three issues from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better.

"Angle, come here! I think I can hear the ocean!"
—Michael Donato, Bohemia, NY

"Maybe if I hug the ropes, Paul Heyman will appear and mentor me through this match."
—Steven Rivas, Perris, CA

"I can't believe I let Vince talk me into a 'Kiss Mae Young' match!"
—Bill Carroll, U.S. military, currently stationed in Iraq

"Oh, God, if I gotta do another F5, I think I'm going to throw up!"
—SheTazQT3@aol.com

Answers to Internet Insider:

Gotcha! Not a single one of those four items was made up!

ringside

With Will Welsh

KURT ANGLE IS A-OKAY. Although various Internet rumors suggested that he might be facing early retirement or at least a very reduced schedule because of his deteriorating neck condition, the former Olympic gold medalist says that he has fully recovered from his second neck surgery in less than one year and is ready to resume a full-time in-ring schedule.

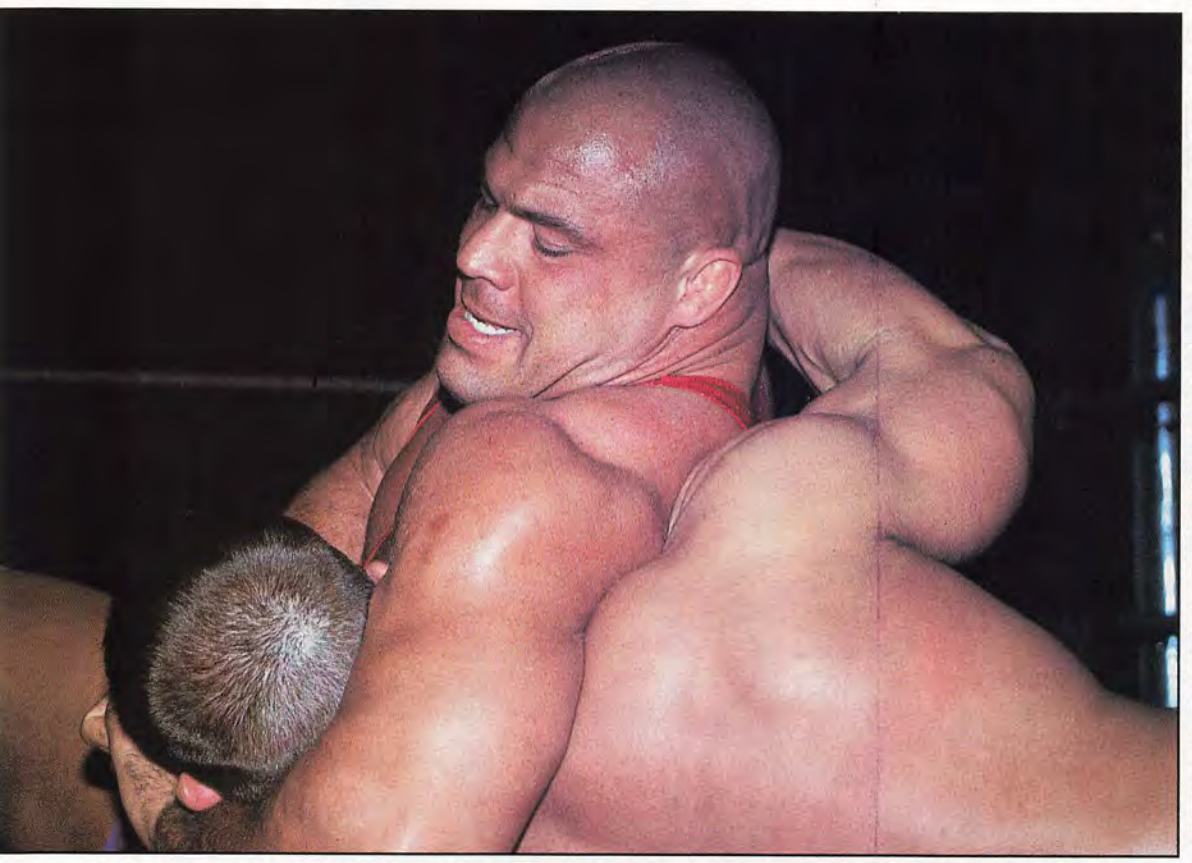
"[Those rumors aren't] even close," said Angle in an interview with wwe.com. "I'm coming back full schedule. I already talked to **J.R. [Jim Ross]** and **Johnny [Laurinitis]**. So that's all the rumors."

Those rumors stemmed from the fact that less than one year after undergoing somewhat experimental neck surgery (rather than the standard fusion surgery that would have kept him out of the ring for about a year) to repair ruptured disks in his neck, Angle was afflicted with neck pain so serious that it forced him to take even more time off to have bone spurs removed from his spine. The effectiveness of that experimental surgery—performed by Pittsburgh surgeon **Dr. Hae-Dong Jho**—and Angle's future were suddenly being questioned.

When WWE officials first learned of Angle's need to take more time off, they had to be a little shocked. Then the shock turned to something darker when they realized they needed a wrestler to step into Angle's shoes and serve as a viable opponent for Smackdown's behemoth champion, **Brock Lesnar**.

The man they came up with was **Hardcore Holly**. If that's not an indictment of the Smackdown main event roster, I'm not sure what would be.

Now, that's not meant as a slight against Hardcore. He's a veteran who's proud of who he is and how he performs in the ring. He's what I'd call a wrestler's wrestler. He works as hard as or harder than anyone in the sport today and is one of the toughest guys in WWE. And since it *was* Lesnar who broke his neck, he had every right to search him out upon his return to action.



WWE almost lost Kurt Angle for a year or more when it was determined he needed neck surgery last spring. He ended up missing two months. He had another neck problem this winter that fueled rumors that he'd need to reduce his schedule or perhaps retire. Those rumors, he insists, aren't true.

Prior to his feud with Lesnar, though, Holly had never been a main eventer. In fact, in recent years, the fans knew him more for his comedic skits with **Crash Holly** and **Molly Holly** and his travails in the hardcore division than his all-around in-ring ability.

Yet he was the one whom WWE tabbed to provide Lesnar with championship competition.

That's how important Kurt Angle is to WWE. With-

out Angle to depend on, that Smackdown roster is quite thin at the top. We found out just how thin this winter, when Smackdown's only other two proven main eventers, Lesnar and **The Undertaker**, were unavailable to matchmakers at the same time Angle's neck was recuperating.

Kurt Angle is Smackdown's most valuable player. WWE needs to protect him in every way possible. Let's hope this latest setback will be his last for quite some time.

Jonny Fairplay, the notorious villain of CBS' *Survivor: Pearl Islands* who faked news of the death of his grandmother to earn sympathy from his fellow *Survivor* competitors, is wrestling's newest heel. When NWA-TNA signed him to a contract in January, it marked arguably the biggest signing in the promotion's short history.

Fairplay isn't a great wrestler. In fact, he's not even good and might serve strictly as a manager/commentator. (He proved to be very full of himself on his first night with the company, antagonizing and angering **A.J. Styles** to a point at which he gave Fairplay a wicked power bomb.)

Fairplay might not increase TNA's buy rates all that much, either. I'm not sure any one wrestler is capable of turning around TNA's fortunes. As we've been writing since the company churned out its first show, in order to set a positive course, TNA must settle down and produce quality pay-per-views week in and week out—something that's been hard to accomplish.

Where Fairplay will matter the most will be in TNA's dealings with mainstream media organizations and cable television stations—especially with the promotion's hope of signing **Hulk Hogan** looking more remote by the day. Fairplay's recognizable name and face should help get TNA on magazine shows such as *Extra* and *Entertainment Tonight*. That could also open doors with cable executives looking to fill their weekly TV lineups.

"The most successful wrestling personalities evoke passion—one way or another—from the fans," said TNA President **Dixie Carter** in a press release announcing the signing. "Based on the reaction Jonny drew from 20-plus million viewers weekly, there's no doubt he will ignite both controversy and intrigue each week on TNA's pay-per-views."

The combination of NWA-TNA and Fairplay could develop into quite a partnership, or it might wind up a miserable flop. We'll know soon enough.

Staying on the topic of combinations, the combinations of WWE and **Brian "Spanky" Kendrick** and WWE and **Kevin Nash** are no more.

NWA-TNA is hoping that the signing of former *Survivor* cast member Jonny Fairplay will give it a much-needed boost. It should earn the promotion at least some attention from the mainstream media, and he already has a lot of people hating him, including A.J. Styles.

Kendrick asked for and received his release from WWE in January, following a year-long stint with the company in which he received a decent initial push with the Smackdown brand, but got lost in the mix quickly thereafter. Of late, he had been partnering with **Paul London**, a team that you were much more likely to see wrestling on *Velocity* than on *Smackdown.*

Now in order to see Kendrick wrestle, you'll have to catch him on the independent circuit or travel to Japan, where he's ready to resume his career with Zero-One, a promotion that employed him in the past.

Kendrick will probably make more money on the independent circuit and for Zero-One than his downside WWE guarantee had been paying him, and he'll get to wrestle matches without constraints once again—a benefit that more and more wrestlers are starting to hold in high regard.

As for the oft-injured Nash, WWE let his two-year contract expire without signing him to a new one. The company offered him a position with the creative team, but Nash turned down the offer.

"On December 31, 2003, my contract with WWE officially ended," wrote Nash on his official Web site. "I met with Vince and we talked about the possibility of my staying with the company in a creative role. This

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Brian "Spanky" Kendrick's quirky personality and wrestling skills made him a hit with a lot of WWE fans. Unfortunately, WWE never made much use of those skills. He got the release he wanted in January and will now be making frequent trips to Japan.

would have meant working five days a week and spending too much time away from my home and family, so I decided not to stay with the company … There are many options in wrestling with other companies and I am also looking into more film and television appearances."

It's hard to believe that we've seen the last of "Big Daddy Cool." He's too tight with too many people in the sport—including **Vince McMahon**—to not jump back into it at some point. There are already rumors going around that Nash is looking to re-form his old partnership with **Scott Hall** in TNA, Japan, or both.

That does it for me this month, fans. Enjoy your wanderings. ☐

Are The Outsiders ready for yet another run? Some people think so. Kevin Nash's WWE contract expired at the end of 2003 and he turned down an offer to join Creative. TNA, Japan, or both could come calling.

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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

1. Airplane spin
2. Arm drag
3. Arm lock
4. Asian spike
5. Atomic drop
6. Bear hug
7. Bite
8. Body slam
9. Body tackle
10. Bulldog
11. Chicken wing
12. Choke slam
13. Claw
14. Clothesline
15. Cross body block
16. Double axehandle
17. Drop kick
18. Eagle split
19. Elbow smash
20. Eye gouge
21. Face rake
22. Fireman's carry ram
23. Flying body press
24. Flying clothesline
25. Flying drop kick
26. Flying elbow drop
27. Flying head butt
28. Flying mare
29. Forearm smash
30. Foreign object
31. Full nelson
32. Giant swing
33. Grapevine
34. Hair pull
35. Hammer lock
36. Head lock
37. Head stomp
38. Hip roll
39. Irish whip
40. Knee drop
41. Leg lock
42. Leg sweep
43. Manager interference
44. Monkey flip
45. Overhead toss
46. Pole ram
47. Reverse chin lock
48. Rolling scissors
49. Rope burn
50. Russian sickle
51. Savate kick
52. Scissors grip
53. Shoulder breaker
54. Slingshot
55. Snap mare
56. Step-over toe hold
57. Suplex
58. Surfboard
59. Turnbuckle smash
60. Wrist lock

SET-UP HOLDS

61. Abdominal stretch
62. Avalanche
63. Backbreaker
64. Backroll press
65. Belly to belly
66. Big splash
67. Boston crab
68. Brain buster
69. Camel clutch
70. Cobra clutch
71. Cradle
72. Crucifix
73. DDT
74. Figure four
75. Flying leg drop
76. Gourd buster
77. Hurricanrana
78. Moonsault
79. Neckbreaker
80. Piledriver
81. Power bomb
82. Power slam
83. Scorpion deathlock
84. Sleeper
85. Slingshot suplex
86. Spine buster
87. Stunner
88. Sunset flip
89. Superplex
90. Texas cloverleaf

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WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES) _____

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: *Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: *Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: *Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.*

_____

in focus

By Dave Lenker

BATISTA'S BURDEN

I know I wasn't the only one watching the Shawn Michaels-Batista match at Armageddon with great interest. And although Batista, with his bulging muscles and icy stare, would never admit it, he had to feel the heat of the huge spotlight as it shone down on him and HBK. Had to sense all those eyeballs trained on him as he stepped through the ropes to start the biggest match of his young career.

Strange as it sounds, these days, when you have the kind of body Batista has, you're probably under more pressure to deliver in the ring than someone with just an average physique. You're forced to prove you're not trying to make it on looks alone.

However, I wonder if he realized just how difficult a spot he was in. The way I see it, Batista still has to prove himself worthy of his WWE push. As a member of Evolution, he shares the ring with one of the greatest stars of all-time, Ric Flair, one of the biggest stars of today, Triple-H, and a young prospect who is about as close to can't-miss as you can get, Randy Orton.

Yet I'm here to tell you that Batista didn't have much to gain from that match, win or lose.

Batista got in a lot of strong offense against Shawn Michaels at Armageddon, and it developed into a good match. But did Batista prove anything to a lot of people who still doubt whether he has the ring skills to be a main eventer in WWE?

Yes, a win would have pushed his name up the Raw rankings a few spots, but a competitive loss wasn't going to drop his name more than a few spots. No, this match had precious little to do with winning and losing. But this was Batista's first major test in WWE.

For those who missed it, Batista dominated much of the Armageddon bout with Michaels, using his clear-cut advantages in size and strength to overwhelm HBK. Yet Michaels used his clear-cut advantages in speed and, much more importantly, savvy to eke out the win in the end. I considered it the best match on just an average WWE PPV card. It was even strong enough to earn Match of the Month honors for December in our recently completed WRESTLING ANNUAL.

Unfortunately for Batista, he had no chance of getting much credit for his part in the match. Could have been the Match of the Year and he wouldn't have gotten much credit. That's the tough thing about wrestling someone as brilliant and versatile as HBK when you're someone as green and unproven as Batista: Deliver a good to great match and your opponent will get deified for somehow, some way carrying you to such a wonderful achievement (at best, you might get lauded for doing a nice job keeping up or not screwing up), but deliver a dud and prepare for all the laments that even the magnificent Michaels couldn't carry a lumbering lummox like you to a passable performance.

You see, only a select few current WWE stars—I'd say only Michaels, Eddie Guerrero, Chris Jericho, Kurt Angle, and Chris Benoit—are so versatile and well-regarded inside the ring that they surprise all of us—*ahem*—experts on the rare occasions when they *can't* get at least a decent match out of a lesser opponent.

Michaels ended up getting much more than a decent match out of Batista on December 14 in Orlando, Florida. Or maybe Batista had a little

more to do with it being a very good match than a lot of us realize or are willing to concede. It's tough to tell. Fair or not, Batista did pass his first major test, but he still has a lot to prove to a lot of people. Perhaps only when *he* is asked to get a great match out of an opponent will he know he has really made it.

HOORAY FOR HARDCORE

I've received a lot of e-mail in the last month or so about a man (*Tough Enough III* aside) I never thought would be the subject of a lot of e-mail. Hardcore Holly in Smackdown main events? Hardcore Holly against Brock Lesnar at the Royal Rumble? Hardcore Holly getting an actual push? Hardcore Holly getting the "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin treatment and getting suspended by the evil executive because he's such a rebel?

I never would have believed it, either, friends. (A quick confession: I forgot about the man entirely for about the first eight months of his rehab from neck surgery.) Yet there he is, banging heads with the big boys—and getting some of those big boys to back down. I thought I was being pretty honest in my responses to readers who asked me about this unlikely push when I admitted there are few WWE wrestlers I feel less strongly about in a positive or negative way than Hardcore Holly. I always got a laugh out of his perpetually miserable demeanor and short fuse, but that was about it.

All that said, I think his push is one of the best developments in WWE in months.

He's still not one of my personal favorite wrestlers to watch. And it's not like he brought himself up to Kurt Angle or Chris Benoit level in the ring since returning from injury. Just the fact that he seemed like such an unlikely candidate for elevation to main event status makes the situation so very intriguing to me.

In a logical sense, though, he was a viable candidate for elevation. He lost a year of ring time because of a neck injury he suffered against Lesnar, so who would you expect him to attack upon his return, Johnny Stamboli? Still, Hardcore Holly, WWE Smackdown champion ... it just doesn't sound right. While I don't think that will ever happen, this has to give hope to so many other WWE stars. If Hardcore Holly is getting his shot at the top, why not Rhyno or RVD or Booker T or Sean O'Haire? Why not Nunzio?

Likewise, this has to give hope to all of you out there who have lost faith in WWE Creative, which has been guilty of relying on the same top stars and recycled feuds for too long. Maybe that glass ceiling has cracks in it after all.

What's the worst thing that could happen if a few mid-carders, like Holly, are offered a shot at tussling with the main eventers for a few months at a time? They'll prove that they deserve to be mid-carders and nothing more. One of them—and maybe two or three of them!—might just catch fire unexpectedly and *stay* at the top of the card. The entire federation could be freshened up as a result.

If it happens, we should all make sure to give Hardcore Holly the credit he deserves. I know I always thought he was underrated.

(Have a comment or question about "In Focus" or anything else you see in ***PWI?*** *You can contact Dave Lenker via e-mail at dave_lenker@yahoo.com.)* □

One of the strangest stories to develop in WWE at the end of 2003 was the emergence of Hardcore Holly as a threat to Brock Lesnar. While Holly might not be a foil for Lesnar for long, his ascension could be good news to a lot of WWE stars.

off the top rope

By Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:
TOP ROPE Box 1148 Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or send e-mail to: **offthetoprope@yahoo.com**

(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

OH, THE WEATHER outside is frightful, but it's not nearly as frightening as my mailbag. The depth of idiocy displayed in each letter is astounding. It makes me realize that we must put more money into our education system for the good of mankind (no, not Foley, but I'm sure he'd agree). That would be a hell of a lot easier than forcing stupid people to stop breeding. How is it that Bob Barker can call for the spaying and neutering of pets and get praised, yet I ask for one lousy neutering of an idiot and I'm called heartless? I know that somewhere, Darwin is applauding me.

The only thing these letters breed for me is a deeper contempt for wrestling fans. How can you call yourself a fan if you don't have tolerance for other views or the ability to accept that other people know more than you? We're all human and deserve the right to have opposing views. I present a different view on a wide array of topics that challenge your meager mind. Instead of stepping up to the task and expanding your knowledge, you tend to just hear the insults and react to them without fully thinking your rebuttal through. Remember, kiddies, in this game of intellectual chess, I will always be your champion.

Brandi,

First of all, I have been a fan of wrestling for 20 years and I don't appreciate your comments about Jeff Hardy. You don't know him, and clearly you never paid attention to everything he went through for the fans.

Jeff has been in many more brutal matches than some of the top WWE stars today, like Triple-H, Randy Orton, Batista, John Cena, Brock Lesnar, Scott Steiner, Test—and even my favorites: Kurt Angle, Chris Benoit, Kevin Nash, and The Rock. Now I'm not saying these men aren't good, but they didn't have objects flying at them every night for weeks the way Jeff did. Even if it wasn't an object, he was going against guys like Big Show. Even The Rock said Big Show was hard to wrestle, and Jeff was put against him on numerous occasions. Undertaker gave Jeff respect after just one ladder match. That alone speaks volumes about Jeff. He even had some brutal non-televised matches as well.

Also, Jeff was supposed to get a break when the great "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin walked out, but Jeff stayed. I think that also says a lot about Jeff and not much about you and your statements. He stayed and went through the same crap that they are now doing to Shannon Moore. So please, before you say something, do me and other fans a favor and make sure what you're saying is the truth. He was way overdue for a break. Thanks a lot.

Not much of a fan,
JENN FREARS
Tonawanda, NY

If chosen, you may publish this letter. (I was told you needed authorization.) I have my own copy.

Jenn,

First off, if you've been a fan for 20 years, your puffy, junior high script—complete with cutesy triangles as commas—doesn't seem right. You may just be immature, which would explain your baseless diatribe. If I don't know Jeff Hardy, then who was the guy I first met at the 1999 Super 8 Tournament? Geez, all of these years and dozens of Cracker Barrel dinners later—and now I find out that wasn't Jeff?

I followed Jeff Hardy's career since

Here's a shot of Jeff Hardy from his early days in Vince Land. He was used for many years as a nameless TV opponent who inevitably lost to his opponent—and it was usually in some horrific fashion.

I started here at *PWI* in 1994, which was only a few months after he started with WWE. He was the potential nobody who was used as TV opponent fodder. It took years for Jeff and Matt to become uberfamous. Sure, they were innovative, but once guys like Edge and Christian started matching their every move, it was obvious that the Hardys hit a glass ceiling. The risk of each stunt is directly proportionate to the need of Jeff and Matt to be noticed by officials. Being kings of the mid-card wasn't what they had in mind. Now, from those amazing TLC matches, only Edge has gotten elevated to main event status. Why? Edge is 6'4" and the others aren't. Edge has that in common with almost every superstar you listed. Added bonus: Those big guys didn't have to kill themselves to get to the top, either.

While cheers are dandy, you can't deposit them into a bank account. Jeff was living out his childhood dream, but it took a toll on him. He left out of frustration and a need to do something less taxing. He had the money to live comfortably while deciding on his next goal, so leaving was a good option. Take my advice and get over it. If you miss him, buy a Peroxwhy?gen CD.

By the way, I don't need your permission to print your letter. My column is solely based upon reader mail; it is inferred that any letter may be printed if it is sent. Why else would you send it? Also, I suggest checking your copy against this edited version so you can learn even more from this experience.

Dear Brandi,

First off, I've got to say that I love your little gimmick. You're the only *PWI* columnist that makes sense. All of the others spend way too much time writing pointless articles, while you get down to the meat and point out the flaws of everyone that writes to you. I'm sure you'll find a way to pick my letter apart as well, but I'm all for it.

As far as a question goes, I was wondering if you could give me some advice. I have friends that have either given up on wrestling altogether or haven't been a fan and have said that nothing could get them to be one. I know that they do appreciate fine athletic competition, no matter what form it comes in. But first, I need to get them to sit down and watch *Smackdown* (maybe even *Raw*). Do you have any advice on how I can get them to do it? Is there any way to get them to look past necrophilia, endless handicap matches, and the "Vince and Stephanie show" and see wrestling for what it truly can be? Thanks.

JEREMY SIMPSON
Hopkins, MI

Dear Jeremy,

The best way for you to get anyone to watch wrestling is to forego Vince and his traveling circus altogether. I suggest checking out a tape of either Ohio Valley Wrestling or Ring of Honor. They're both fairly straightforward wrestling without tacky angles (for the most part). If you're still convinced that WWE is your best bet, record *Velocity*, *Heat*, and *Smackdown* and compile a tape that includes the best of The World's Greatest Tag Team, Kurt Angle, Victoria, Rey Misterio Jr., Randy Orton, and Ric Flair. That might be the only way you can get those wayward fans to watch again.

As for my "little gimmick," I'm a natural heel. My friends named me "Queen Of All Evil" many years ago for a reason. To borrow a phrase from The Christopher Street Connection, "It's not a gimmick, it's a lifestyle."

Why am I running this photo of Mae Young? *Because I can.* If just looking at her hurts your eyes, Kendall, imagine the hurting she could put on your body if she got a hold of you. She's my hero.

Letter of the month (taken verbatim from the actual letter to share my torture with you all):

DEAR BRANDI,

LAST WEEK I SENT YOU AN EMAIL CHALENGING YOU TO RUN A PIC OF YOUSELF,IF YOU DECIDE TO PUBLISH THAT LETTER COULD YOU PLEASE PUT MY NAME AT THE END OF THE LETTER BECAUSE I FORGOT TO. MY NAME IS KENDALL NICKENS. IVE ALSO WROTE TO YOU BEFORE AND YOU PUBLISHED MY QUESTION OF WHY YOU AND PWI SPELL REY MISTERIO'S NAME WITH AN I INSTEAD OF AN Y.

signature

FUTURE WWE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION AND CURRENT ABW WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION KENDALL "THE SYCHO" NICKENS,JR.

cmpunk69@yahoo.com

Dear Readers,

Since this backyard twerp didn't say please in either of his letters, I refuse to publish a photo of myself. Instead, I'll print a photo of my choosing—just because I can. Of course, in his honor, I also included Rey Misterio's name somewhere in my column just so he can see, once again, how it is properly spelled. By the way, your e-mail address is disturbing. □

krew-cuts

By Frank Krewda

WWE Cabinet selections. I don't know if it's the sight of Raw Sheriff Steve Austin zipping around on that four-wheeler trying to uphold the "law" or watching The Keystone Kops—*oops,* I mean the current field of possible Democratic presidential candidates—slug it out on cable news networks, but lately my mind can hardly separate the two. On its own, each topic provides some sort of entertainment, I guess. But a commingling of the two makes for some interesting wrestling-slash-political debate. In case you're not getting my drift, I submit my selection of President, Vice President, and Cabinet appointees (assuming I was to become the potentate of World Wrestling Entertainment) for your perusal.

President: Ric Flair. Certainly the elder statesman of the game ... History of leading troops (see Horsemen, Evolution) successfully into battle makes him the ultimate commander-in-chief ... Like several Presidents on both sides of the aisle, knows how to break and bend rules, as well as use them to his advantage ... Only serious drawback? Convincing Flair to vacate the White House after two terms would undoubtedly take some doing. Look at his reluctance to hang up the tights.

Vice President: Arn Anderson. Flair's most dependable crony ... Has always been adept at working smoothly behind the scenes ... Equally adept at keeping his boss's ego in check ... Feisty, take-action temperament served him well in the ring ... Would be just as useful for being V.P. ... Flair wouldn't have to worry about his successor ... In much better shape than Dick Cheney.

Attorney General: Mick Foley. Latest (brief) stint as Raw co-GM showed he's not afraid to wield power ... Has Congress' ear (or at least that of WWE Board of Directors), no pun intended ... Used extensive knowledge of WWE by-laws to outfox Eric Bischoff in a recent Raw power play ... Biggest downfall: tendency to crack under pressure ... Recently walked out on WWE when challenged to a fight by Randy Orton. Assistant: Eric Bischoff.

Secretary of Defense: Rico. Dainty image would lure foes into a false sense of superiority ... Tough enough in real life to get the job done in the ring and on the battlefield ... Anyone who can keep legendary tough guy G. Gordon Liddy safe is tough enough for me. Undersecretary: Brock Lesnar.

Secretary of Commerce: Steve Austin. Sold more merchandise than any other wrestler in history ... Came up with the "Stone-Cold" character on his own (okay, with just a little help from his second wife, Jeannie Clark) ... Relaunched his career after several "unprofitable" years ... Kept himself in business despite many major injuries and setbacks ... Blatant disregard for the law makes him an unlikely sheriff, and an even less likely candidate for any high-profile government position, however. Undersec-

"Stone-Cold" Steve Austin as the beer-guzzling, ATV-driving sheriff of *Raw*? It's still a strange sight to behold each and every Monday night. But if he can take on such an unusual authoritative role, why not certain other WWE stars, too!

We can see where Theodore Long would fancy himself a very good politician—ya feelin' him, playa?—but Mark Henry, too? Well, a certain Cabinet position might be just about perfect for him, reasons Frank Krewda.

retary: Hulk Hogan.

Secretary of Labor: Triple-H. Could lead by example ... Few wrestlers have worked harder to achieve their status in the business ... Grueling rehab on several debilitating injuries testament to his penchant for hard work ... Has also worked hard to gain influence in WWE creative meetings ... Being a (newly minted) McMahon promises to be a full-time job of its own, though. Undersecretary: Kurt Angle.

Secretary of the Treasury: Mark Henry or The Big Show. Somehow conned Vince McMahon into handing them lucrative 10-year contracts ... Both deserve cushy government jobs for pulling off such feats ... Still "circulating" around WWE despite tremendous fluctuations in their careers ... Look inflated, yet somehow retain value—otherwise they'd be gone by now. Undersecretary: Scott Steiner.

Secretary of Energy: The Rock. Most electrifying man in sports entertainment ... Ignited *Raw* with recent unexpected appearance ... Has enough juice to light up Hollywood and WWE rings ... Future wrestling career looks dim, but always handy to hot shot live crowds and big events ... Chris Benoit could be a suitable alternate ... No WWE superstar packs more power into each hold, maneuver, movement. Undersecretary: Rey Misterio Jr.

Secretary of Transportation: The Undertaker. Always sports a cool ride to the ring ... Biggest strength is that his familiarity with the "other side" affords him alternate methods of traveling. Undersecretary: Bill Goldberg.

Secretary of Health & Human Services: Theodore Long. Recovered from some health problems and looks stronger than ever ... Lost significant weight from his WCW referee days ... That's how he fits into those sleek, sharp suits ... Preoccupation with racial matters ensures people of all colors, creeds, nationalities, etc. would get the latest, greatest medical care. Undersecretary: Shawn Michaels.

Secretary of State: Buh Buh Ray Dudley. Handled his WWE French problem with more aplomb (and force) than Colin Powell did with his at the U.N. ... Brings new meaning to the term "negotiating table" ... Employs hands-on diplomacy when dealing with stubborn adversaries, namely a closed fist, Buh Buh bomb, or 3D. Undersecretary: D-Von Dudley.

Secretary of Agriculture: Rob Van Dam. We know what RVD would do if he was put in charge.

Press secretary: Paul Heyman. Okay, this isn't a Cabinet position, but it's still important, and Heyman's the guy ... Very experienced at putting a positive spin on negative situations ... Just ask Shane Douglas, Raven, Justin Credible, Francine, Steve Corino, etc. ... Double-talk got him into trouble with Kurt Angle, The Big Show, and Brock Lesnar—as well as with WWE Creative ... Can spit in your face and convince you that it's raining ... Always adept at handling reporters and giving diplomatic yet honest answers ... I know from firsthand experience. Undersecretary: Jim Ross.

On a much more serious note, kudos to WWE for its strong, consistent show of support for our troops in Iraq, and to all the WWE superstars who traveled to hostile territory to help boost moral over there during the holiday season. Your fans at home and abroad appreciate your contributions. □

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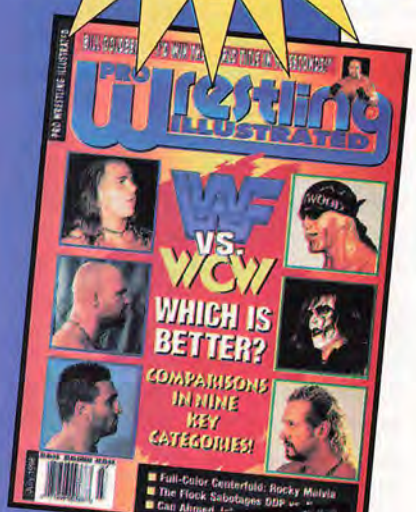

January 1990: Warrior's Next Victim: Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Ross, Midnight Express.

May 1990: Hulk Hogan: Primed And Ready For WrestleMania VI. Centerfold: Great Muta. Plus: Piper-Rude, Eric Embry, Rock 'n' Rolls, Sid Vicious, pain.

July 1990: The Maturing Of Lex Luger: The "Total Package" Becomes The People's Choice. Centerfold: Rick Martel. Plus: Skyscrapers, Bobby Heenan, Mr. Saito, referees.

September 1990: The Hulkster's Wrath: 7,000 Miles To Violent Redemption. Centerfold: The Steiners. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Sting, Destruction Crew, Four Horsemen, Curt Hennig.

October 1990: Sting's Painful Lesson: You'll Have No Friends At The Top. Centerfold: Brutus Beefcake. Plus: Orndorff-Blanchard, Tugboat, Teddy Long, Ultimate Warrior, Road Warriors.

April 1991: Sgt. Slaughter Guilty Of Treason! Centerfold: Tom Zenk. Plus: Sting, Magnum T.A., Jesse Ventura, Lawler-Gilbert, Hogan & Warrior.

June 1991: Hulk Hogan: America's Hero. Centerfold: Hacksaw Duggan. Plus: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Nasty Boys, Steiners, Simmons-Reed.

July 1991: The War Is Over! Hulk Hogan Liberates The WWF Belt From Sgt. Slaughter! Centerfold: Brian Pillman. Plus: Horsemen, Lex Luger, Eric Embry, Demolition.

August 1991 (Special Issue): Supercards '91. Centerfold: Hulk Hogan. Plus: WrestleMania VII, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior, Owen Hart, Koloff-Luger.

October 1991: Sid Justice: The Second Coming Of Hulk Hogan. Centerfold: Lex Luger. Plus: Hogan-Slaughter, Terrence Taylor, Barry Windham, Williams-Bigelow.

November 1991: Your Wedding Gift For Savage & Elizabeth: Help Lift The "Macho Man's" Suspension! Centerfold: Bobby Eaton. Plus: Tito Santana, Bushwhackers, Jushin Liger, Brian Pillman.

February 1992: Has Hulk Hogan Had Enough? Centerfold: 1992 calendar. Plus: Sting, Justice-Roberts, hot prospects, Eddie Gilbert.

May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

June 1992: Exclusive *PWI* Interview: Roddy Piper Speaks Out! Centerfold: Dustin Rhodes. Plus: Dangerously-Sting, Abdullah-Cactus, Sid Justice, Randy Savage.

July 1992: The Best Of The Best—The Masters Of Their Craft. Centerfold: Randy Savage. Plus: Liger-Pillman, Jim Neidhart, U.S.-Japan, Ric Flair.

September 1992: Savage vs. Sting: Why It Isn't That Unlikely. Centerfold: Nikita Koloff. Plus: Steiners, Barry Windham, Sid Justice, Hodge & Weston, Shawn Michaels.

October 1992: The Hatred Still Runs Deep: Ultimate Warrior vs. Randy Savage—They'll Settle Up At SummerSlam! Centerfold: Cactus Jack. Plus: Steve Williams, Tom Zenk, WWF title controversy, fire match, Eric Embry.

February 1993: No One Can Cut Down Razor Ramon. Centerfold: Curt Hennig. Plus: Jake Roberts, Pillman-Dustin, Ric Flair-Road Warriors, Rick Rude, Snuka-Muraco.

May 1993: WrestleMania Without Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: The Undertaker. Plus: Ron Simmons, Cactus Jack, Madusa-Sherri, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior.

April 1996: WCW World Title Turmoil. Centerfold: The Kid. Plus: Hulk Hogan, Ahmed Johnson, Bob Armstrong, Michaels-Bret, Public Enemy.

May 1996: Un-Natural! The WWF Has Finally Gone Too Far! Centerfold: Public Enemy. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn, Ric Flair, Giant.

October 1996: Peaking Too Soon: Will The Giant Be Ruined By His Own Success? Centerfold: Goldust. Plus: Big Van Vader, Ric Flair, Bulldog, Lex Luger.

February 1997: Mr. Perfect: "Shawn Michaels Stole My Life." Centerfold: "Psycho" Sid. Plus: Kroffat & Furnas, Vince McMahon, Randy Savage, New Razor & New Diesel.

July 1997: Steve Austin: Stone-Cold And Uncensored! Centerfold: "Diamond" Dallas Page. Plus: Rocky Maivia, The Road Warriors, The Eliminators, Nick Patrick.

December 1997: Ken Shamrock's Deadly Climb To The Top. Centerfold: Randy Savage. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Eddy Guerrero, Perry Saturn, WWF light heavyweights.

February 1998: Sting vs. Hogan—The Match Of The Century! Centerfold: Hogan vs. Sting fight poster. Plus: 16-page Starrcade preview, Perry Saturn, Dude Love.

May 1998: Starrcade Scandal! We Hate To Say It ... But Give The Belt Back To Hogan. Centerfold: Ric Flair. Plus: Mero & Sable, Taz, Taka Michinoku.

June 1998 (Special Issue): The 1998 *PWI* Poll. Centerfold: Steve Austin. Plus: Sabu, Lex Luger, Sting, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg.

July 1998: WWF vs. WCW: Which Is Better? Centerfold: Rocky Maivia. Plus: Benoit, Bill Goldberg, Ahmed Johnson.

October 1998: Bret Screws Bret, Part II. Centerfold: Hunter Hearst Helmsley. Plus: Jim Ross, Marcus Bagwell, WWF controversy, FBI.

November 1998: Vince Mc(Mad)Man! He Crossed The Bottom Line ... Now He'll Pay! Centerfold: Kevin Nash. Plus: Sting, Bret Hart, Taz-Douglas, New Age Outlaws.

Holiday 1998: *PWI* 500. Eighth Annual Special.

March 1999: 1998—The Year In Wrestling. 1998 In Review, Achievement '98 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 1999.

April 1999: The Crock! The Title Change That Screwed The World! Centerfold: Chris Jericho. Plus: Bill Goldberg, Tommy Dreamer, Booker T, more Unofficial/Officials.

May 1999: Who Holds The Key To WrestleMania XV? Centerfold: Konnan. Plus: Mark Henry, Sting-Nash, Bill Alfonso, Brian Hildebrand.

June 1999: The *PWI* Poll. Plus: Mankind, Flair & Turner, VMac, Steiners, New Japan-UFO.

July 1999: Warning! This Team Will Self-Destruct In 15 Seconds! Centerfold: X-Pac. Plus: New Jack-Dudleys, Jesse James, Venis & Godfather, Sting-Bischoff-Flair.

August 1999: Supercards '99: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Super 8, Bam Bam Bigelow, Jerry Lawler, tag team wrestling.

September 1999: Why Stone-Cold Might Get Out While He's Still On Top! Centerfold: Sting. Plus: Kidman & Misterio, The Rock, Bret Hart, Taz-Sabu.
October 1999: Why The World Must Fear Scott Steiner, By Buff Bagwell. Centerfold: Mankind. Plus: Kane & X-Pac, The Godfather, Perry Saturn, 20th anniversary readers' poll.
November 1999: The Women Of The WWF: There's More To Their Power Than Their Looks. Centerfold: Owen Hart. Plus: Rey Misterio Jr., Roddy Piper, Steiners, Steve Austin.
December 1999: Steve Austin: "CEO This! I'm The Damn Champ!" Centerfold: Rey Misterio Jr. Plus: Randy Savage, Jimmy Hart, WCW youth, Billy Gunn.
Holiday 1999: *PWI* 500. Ninth Annual Special.
January 2000: The Millennium Man Mouths Off! An Unforgettable Hour With Chris Jericho! Centerfold: Taz. Plus: Chris Benoit, Sid-Goldberg, Triple-H.
February 2000: The Master Manipulator! How Stone-Cold Controls The WWF. Centerfold: Kane. Plus: Paul Heyman, Hogan-Bret-Sting-Luger.
March 2000: 1999—The Year In Wrestling. 1999 In Review, Achievement'99 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 2000.
April 2000: Stone-Cold vs. The Rock: Let's Settle It At WrestleMania! Centerfold: Chris Benoit. Plus: Dallas Page, Goldberg-Vicious, more Unofficial awards.
May 2000: The Y2K *PWI* Poll. Plus: Mitsuharu Misawa, Triple-H, Bret Hart, Hollys, Chyna & Aysa, ECW returnees.
June 2000: Just Wondering, Steph ... Is Triple-H Worth Your Billion-Dollar Inheritance? Centerfold: The Rock. Plus: Heyman-Van Dam, Vader, NWO.
July 2000: Call It A Wrap, Jack! You've Done Your Share ... Go Home! Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Dusty Rhodes, Disco Inferno, DDP, Dudleys-Hardys.
August 2000: Supercards 2000: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Rob Van Dam, greatest supercards, Super 8.
September 2000: Wrestle McMania! Why The Peace Can't Last. Centerfold: Jeff Jarrett. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Dudleys, Raven.
October 2000: Scott Steiner: The Superstar The WWF Let Slip Away. Centerfold: Rikishi. Plus: Shawn Michaels, Austin-Rock, Rhino-RVD.
November 2000: The Rock vs. Triple-H. Our Special 50-Category Analysis. Pinups: Extreme wrestling. Plus: Nash-Steiner-Hall, Hardcore Holly, wrestling too extreme?
December 2000: Head Hog! Does Undertaker Have Enough Gas In His Tank To Rumble To The Top? Centerfold: Dallas Page. Plus: Kurt Angle, Rikishi, Vampiro-Sting, Japan.
[FULL-COLOR BEGINNING WITH HOLIDAY 2000]
Holiday 2000 (116 Pages): *PWI* 500. Includes: The editors' views, a look back at 1991's top 25, Achievement 2000 ballot.
January 2001: Who Does He Really Hate? Someone Will Pay For Austin's Pain! Plus: Steven Richards, Justin Credible, Gordon Solie, Jeff Jarrett, Arn-Sid.
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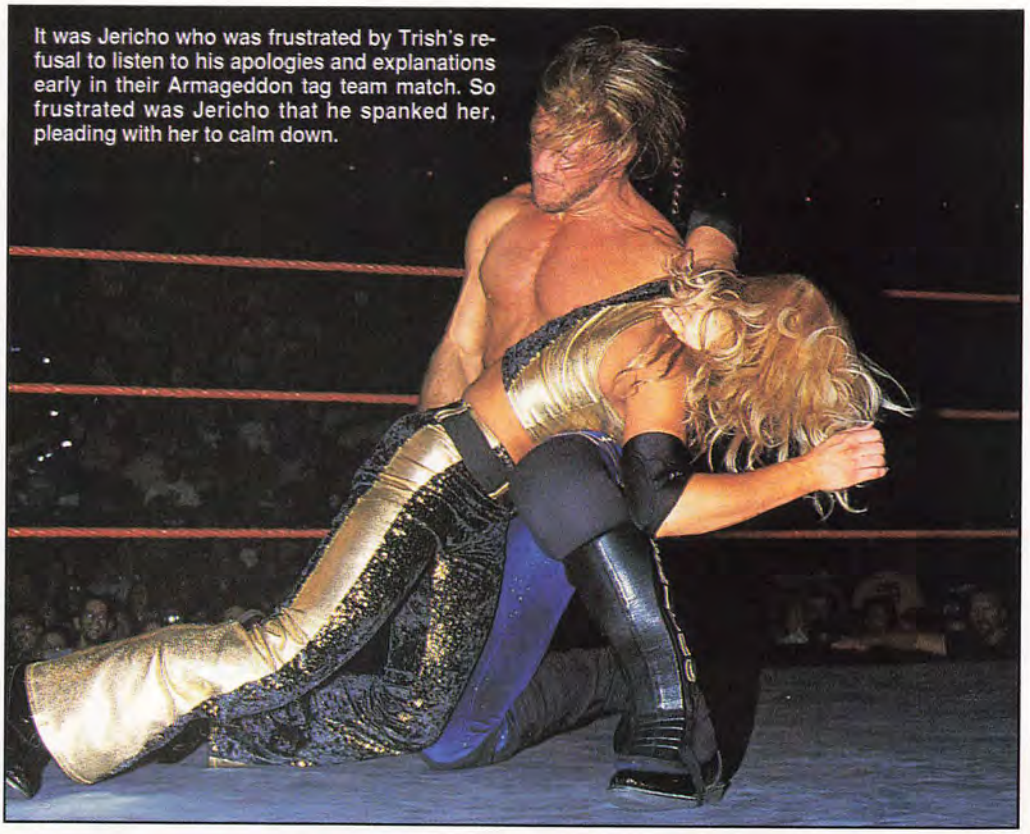


It was Jericho who was frustrated by Trish's refusal to listen to his apologies and explanations early in their Armageddon tag team match. So frustrated was Jericho that he spanked her, pleading with her to calm down.

TRISH STRATUS

"STRATUSFACTION" MAY BE guaranteed, but Trish Stratus' long-term success is not. That's why Stratus is still out to prove that she's more than just the latest pinup girl produced by the WWE hype machine. She doesn't want to join stars such as Sunny, Tori, and Chyna in the company's long line of disposable divas. Fortunately, Stratus' impressive work ethic and girlish enthusiasm are paying off. Over the past year, the Toronto native has surpassed even Lita as the most popular female on the Raw roster.

Why not? WWE fans have seen Stratus evolve from being the T & A manager of Test and Albert (A-Train), to a diva who can do it all. She possesses the beauty of Torrie Wilson and the wrestling skills of Molly Holly. Indeed, no other diva combines smoldering sexuality and pure athleticism into such a dynamic package. But even with those attributes, can she achieve respectability in WWE's male-dominated environment?

Upon defeating reigning champion Victoria and Jazz in a three-way match at WrestleMania XIX, Stratus tied Fabulous Moolah for the most WWE women's titles, at four apiece. Although Stratus lost the belt to Jazz on April 27, 2003, and had not regained it at press time, she has come a long way in gaining respect among the other women on the Raw roster. Yet the same cannot be said for certain men on the Raw roster.

It turned out that Chris Jericho's courtship of Stratus in late-2003 was part of a childish bet to see whether Jericho could gain Trish's, um, *affections before Christian could gain Lita's. When Jericho and Christian's sick competition came to light, co-General Manager Eric Bischoff booked them against Stratus and Lita in "Battle Of The Sexes" match at Armageddon. Christian scored a cheap pinfall over Stratus in that bout. This soap opera could play out for months.*

Where does Stratus go from here? Does she believe Jericho when he claims to regret his actions and have true feelings for her? Will she give him a second chance? Or will she refocus on winning a fifth women's title? Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker, Senior Writer Harry Burkett, and Contributing Writer Liz Hunter spoke to Stratus following the January 5 edition of ***Raw.***

LIZ HUNTER: Let's skip over the formalities, and cut right to the chase, Trish. Dave, Harry, and I, along with thousands of fans in this arena and millions more watching at home, have watched Chris Jericho manipulate you yet again. Don't let that male chauvinist jackass do it to you, Trish. Just don't let him do it. I don't care if he gives you the puppy dog eyes. Just don't do it. Don't ever take him back!

DAVE LENKER: Liz, don't you think that Trish should decide ... Trish ... I'm sorry. I apologize if Liz came off ...

TRISH STRATUS: No, no need to apologize, guys. Really. I know where you're coming from, Liz. Believe me, I have experienced a roller-coaster of emotions over the past month or two. Chris and I got to know each other just as casual backstage acquaintances, nothing more. Like every superstar in this locker room, Chris has a really complex personality. Like everybody else here, and myself included to a certain extent, Chris goes through that curtain and amps up one aspect of his personality. He goes out there and acts like an obnoxious jerk, and that's why fans have come to hate him so much. But when Chris tones it down, even that jerk side can be endearing in a way.

HUNTER: Here we go. The battered woman is already making excuses for the man that has abused her. And it's not like you and Chris were a couple to begin with! He and Christian placed a disgusting bet on which one of them would be the first to, to ...

STRATUS: Okay, Liz, we all know the sordid details. And, believe me, Lita is just as angry as I am. I'm not making excuses for Chris. I am simply explaining to you how I got sucked in by him.

HUNTER: So you admit this was a total con job? So you realize that Chris just wanted to make you—and women everywhere—look like idiots. So you realize ...

STRATUS: Okay, okay, Liz. You can take a breath, can't you? Against my better judgment, I began indulging Chris, talking to him after the shows and maybe going out for a bite to eat. My biggest regret is that I told him some very personal details about my life ... I feel like I bared my soul to him, gave him a piece of my heart, and he stole it and stomped on it. I was never after Chris because I wanted a boyfriend. The truth is I just thought I had gained a really good *friend.* Period. He abused that friendship.

HARRY BURKETT: Trish, I think you should know that Liz has had a long-running issue with Chris Jeri-

"The world is too large with too many men that you can trust all of the time, not just some of the time. I'm not sure I want to keep wondering about a man's motives. Chris is trying to make things right. But how can things go back to the way they were?"

Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.

cho, ever since his relationship with Chyna a few years ago. In Liz' defense, Jericho has a proven track record of using women to achieve his own goals. He can be quite vicious, too. I'll never forget how Jericho tied up Chyna in a chair and smashed her thumb with a hammer. That was hideous.

HUNTER: Yes, I held Chyna's injured hand in Dr. Westbaum's office. But that doesn't mean I have some obsession or grudge against Jericho. It makes me more qualified to understand what the man is capable of. He's paranoid and insecure, and will never let a woman get more of the spotlight than him. He's dangerous. I've seen the damage up close.

BURKETT: At the risk of incurring Liz' wrath, let's analyze Jericho from another perspective. Trish, you said Chris was so effective at hoodwinking you because he had some endearing qualities. Could it be that Chris let his guard down during those same private moments? Maybe he bared some of his soul to you, too. Maybe all of this did start as part of a stupid bet between Chris and Christian. But once the two of you were together, maybe Chris realized you were more important to him than that.

HUNTER: Harry, don't you try to persuade her ...

STRATUS: Wait a minute. You're exactly right. That's what makes all of this so complicated and tough to deal with and sort out. There was some genuine sharing there. But I strongly feel that Chris should have respected me enough to call off that dumb bet. Why should he care what Christian thinks? He's a loser, anyway.

LENKER: Not to contradict you, but Christian was the big winner at Armageddon, when he rolled you up for a pin to win the match. How did you feel about teaming with Lita against Christian and Jericho? Did you dread that match, or did you look forward to it?

STRATUS: I really looked forward to it, Dave. I had so much frustration in me that I couldn't see straight. I know Lita felt the same way. In some ways, she actually had it worse. She had been with Matt Hardy for a couple of years, then, all of a sudden, he shows up on *Raw* and humiliates her by the end of the night. All of it was to gain favor with Eric Bischoff. Then it turned out to be Christian who was the only person who gave Lita a shoulder to cry on. No, Lita wasn't looking for a relationship with Christian. She was already hurt enough by Matt. But Christian humiliated Lita, too, and treated the whole thing like a big joke. There was never any sincerity there. It was disgusting. Christian needs to grow up.

LENKER: Do you think Jericho is showing signs of growing up? After all, the reason Christian pinned you at Armageddon is because Jericho was helping you up, and Christian snuck up behind you for the pin. I don't think Jericho set you up on purpose.

Stratus executed a beautiful huracanrana on Jericho in their match (above left), but he was just too strong for her at times (above right). Anyway, that Armageddon match wasn't really about which team would outwrestle the other. It was much more personal.

In case you're a big Stratus fan, don't fret that Trish (trying to fight off a Molly Holly/Gail Kim double-team effort) has forgotten about the women's title. It's just that this situation with Y2J could take a while to sort out.

STRATUS: No, but it was too little too late. He's already broken my trust in him. It's just … I think it's probably too late.

LENKER: Well, let me continue. He has helped you out on some shows recently, only to have you march backstage and leave him standing in the ring. But, on one occasion, if this arena report is correct, you actually hugged Jericho briefly after he helped you.

STRATUS: Yeah, that did happen. I got caught up in the moment, I guess. I was grateful because I thought Chris was being sincere. He's capable of some sincerity, you know.

LENKER: And tonight, Theodore Long—who was substituting for Eric Bischoff as co-GM—granted you a non-title match against the women's champion, Molly Holly. Jazz attacked both you and Molly to end the match. Chris rescued you again, but you weren't very receptive. And, if you were watching the monitor, you heard all those heartfelt comments Jericho made about you when he thought you were in the shower.

STRATUS: *(Laughs)* It serves him right that Mae [Young] was in the shower. Maybe Chris and Christian should make a bet on Mae and Moolah. They might have better luck there. Seriously, though, the world is too large with too many men that you can trust all of the time, not just some of the time. I'm not sure I want to keep wondering about a man's motives. Chris is trying to make things right. But how can things go back to the way they were? Look, is this all we're going to talk about tonight? After all, I do have a real career.

HUNTER: We've talked about your relationship with Jericho because it has consumed your career as of late. Don't you realize how much Jericho is costing you? Molly Holly defended the women's title against Lita at Survivor Series and against Ivory at Armageddon—not you. Hasn't this whole issue sidetracked your career?

STRATUS: Not really. Ivory and Lita both deserved those title shots, and I'm sure I'll receive more in the future. In a weird way, I've been able to reveal more of my personality to the fans and, hopefully, serve as sort of a role model for all those teenage girls out there. You shouldn't let guys run your lives, but at the same time, you can't let sour relationships make you bitter and jaded.

HUNTER: Yeah, they'll find out where that leads them.

STRATUS: It will lead them to happiness in the end. Remember, you can't leave yourself open to love if you don't leave yourself open for hurt. □

Maybe in the end, Stratus will decide that it's nice to have strong male wrestlers (like Buh Buh Ray Dudley) as allies, but not as love interests.

RANDY ORTON'S DAD SPEAKS OUT: "RIC FLAIR IS GONNA RUIN MY BOY!"

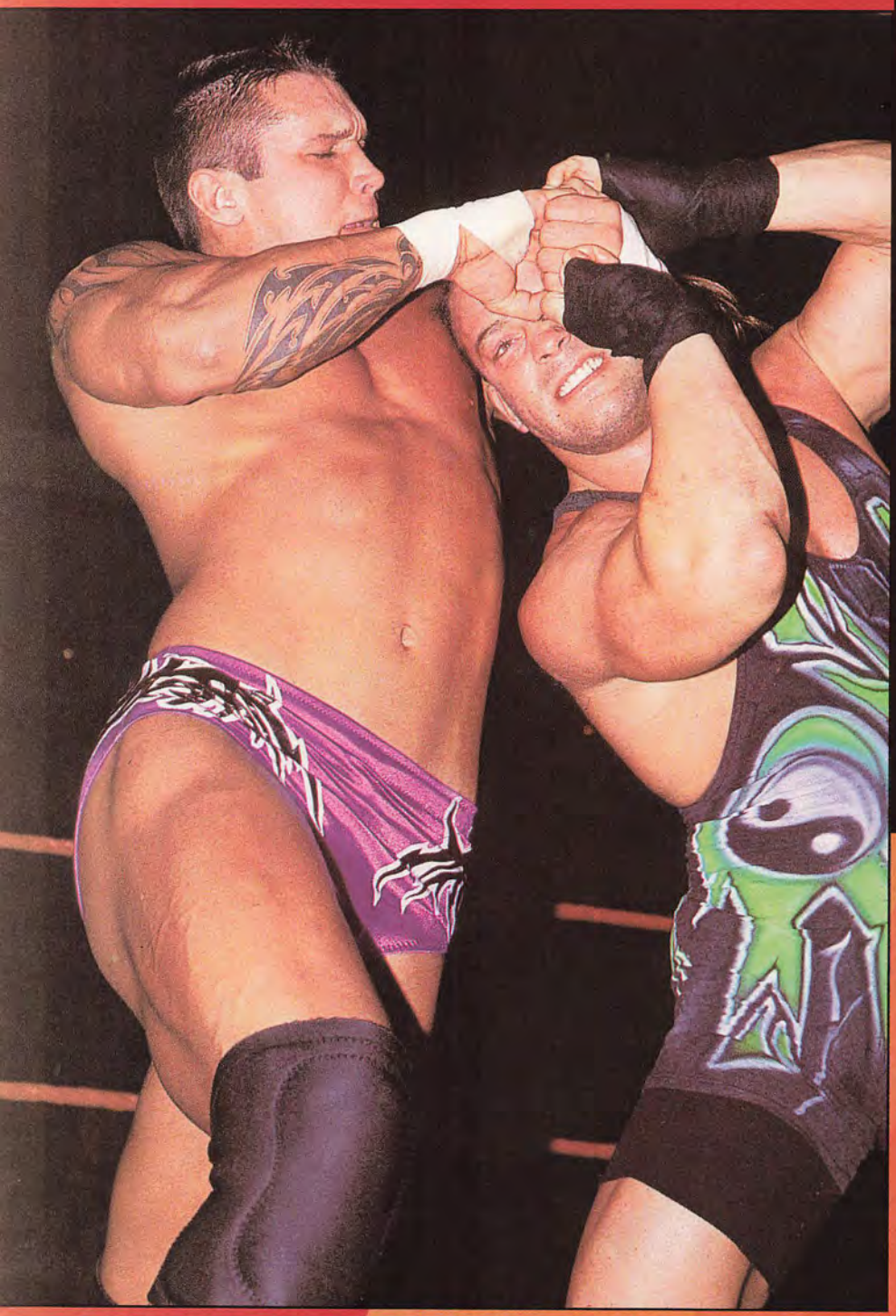
"Cowboy" Bob Orton is very proud of his son's success in WWE, but he thinks Ric Flair is a destructive influence. In this exclusive feature, the elder Orton—in his own words—gives Randy what he thinks is some career-saving advice

By Bob Orton Jr.

LET'S GET SOMETHING straight at the beginning: I'm not going to waste your time with a bunch of holier-than-thou bull. I was never a model citizen in the wrestling business. A lot of people considered me a mercenary, a gun for hire. I collected bounties without losing a wink of sleep. Heck, sometimes I broke people's bones just for the hell of it. For most of my career, I didn't worry about having a conscience. That's something that would have just held me back.

I'm proud to tell you I was in every manager's Rolodex. Bobby Heenan wanted to take out Dusty Rhodes, so he called me. Roddy Piper wanted to take out Mr. T, so he called me. Sir Oliver Humperdink, J.J. Dillon—it didn't matter. Just so the check cleared or the money was green, that's all that was important to me. I'm not apologizing for what I've done in the wrestling business. So, if you expect this to be some kind of hypocritical conversion, don't

Ric Flair proudly strapped the Intercontinental belt around Randy Orton's waist after he won it at Armageddon, and Orton was proud to have Flair do the honors. Bob Orton Jr., Randy's father, would just as soon see his son distance himself from the 16-time world champ.



Bob Orton is correct when he points out that his son wrestled a terrific match against Rob Van Dam at Armageddon. He might also be correct in asserting that Orton could have won the match and title without even a distraction from Flair.

A 20-YEAR GRUDGE? WHY BOB ORTON JR. REALLY HATES RIC FLAIR!

In the case of the Ortons and Ric Flair, a friend of the son is not a friend of the father. Indeed, Flair's adoption of Randy Orton as a protege seems strange to long-time fans who remember when "Cowboy" Bob Orton Jr. was the "Nature Boy's" worst enemy. Two decades ago, Orton tried to end Flair's career.

It all began on June 10, 1983, when Harley Race defeated Flair for the NWA World title in St. Louis. Although Race embarked on an ambitious schedule of title defenses around the globe, he knew Flair still posed the most dangerous threat.

In a tactic similar to Triple-H placing a $100,000 bounty on Raw champ Bill Goldberg in

worry, because that isn't what this little advice column is about at all. In fact, this is the best kind of advice, gleaned from bitter experience, a few mistakes, and 30 years of figuring out what makes for a successful wrestling career. This advice is even more important because I'm giving it to a person who is very important to *me*. This advice is for my son.

You've seen him on TV. He's the man I'm proud to call the WWE Intercontinental champion: Randy Orton. It makes me proud to say that because I spent quite a few years chasing the Intercontinental champion, both Pedro Morales and Tito Santana. I chased the Intercontinental title and the WWF title and came up dry. Only three years into his career, Randy is already showing up his old man, and that's the way I like it.

What I don't care for is Randy's spot, or maybe you'd say membership, in Evolution. Don't get me wrong. I don't have a problem with pooling your resources and working as a team to reach your goals. When I used to hang around Dick Slater, Don Kernodle, and Gary Hart, or Roddy Piper and Paul Orndorff, people used to call us thugs because we ganged up on people. I preferred to think we were team players. The idea behind Evolution is a good one, with Randy, Triple-H, Batista, and Ric Flair working together for the betterment—if I can use a fancy word—of their careers. As of this moment, Randy is the Intercontinental champ, Triple-H is the champion of Raw, and Flair and Batista are the tag team champions. Better than The Four Horsemen in their heyday, right?

2003, Race—displaying a briefcase full of cash—offered $25,000 to anyone who could eliminate Flair. The pressure became intense when promoter Jim Crockett Jr., through the NWA Board of Directors, scheduled Race for a World title defense against the former champion at the first-ever Starrcade, dubbed "A Flair For The Gold," to be held on November 24 in Greensboro, North Carolina. And, for the first time, the NWA belt would be at stake inside a steel cage.

Bob Orton Jr., who moseyed into the Mid-Atlantic in the fall of 1983, joined other local stars in rallying around Flair in his quest for the title. That's why everyone was stunned when Orton turned against Flair and joined Dick Slater in a vicious two-on-one attack. But this was no ordinary heel turn. Orton and Slater, aware that the "Nature Boy" had incurred serious spinal injuries in a plane crash eight years earlier, wrenched Flair's head with a vicious neck twist.

Orton and Slater didn't collect Race's bounty, however. Flair was discharged from the hospital and his upcoming match against Race remained intact.

Nearing Starrcade, Orton shared his displeasure on a November broadcast of *World Wide Wrestling.* "Every wrestler alive wants to win the world's heavyweight wrestling championship," he told the Mid-Atlantic audience. "But I think that having a steel cage match is a disgrace. I think it's ridiculous for Harley Race to come to Ric Flair's backyard and have to put that World title up in a steel cage. Let me tell ya something, Harley Race, and let me tell you rasslin' fans something, too: I personally am going to try to make sure that when the 24th rolls around, Ric Flair is not healthy enough to step into that cage."

Orton didn't count on some of Flair's former enemies coming to his defense. Wahoo McDaniel joined Flair in a series of tag team matches against Orton and Slater. Even long-time rivals Rick Steamboat and Roddy Piper condemned Slater and especially Orton, who had pretended to be Flair's friend. Flair survived Orton's manhunt and defeated Race inside the cage for his second NWA World title. Over the next 20 years, Flair would go on to win 14 more. Had Orton succeeded in his dastardly plot, the Flair era could have ended before it began.

Perhaps the question isn't whether Randy Orton can trust Ric Flair. Can Flair trust Randy Orton?

—Harry Burkett

Maybe so, and there's no doubt that Ric Flair is the driving force behind the concept. The Horsemen gave Flair his greatest glory in the '80s, and now he wants to ride out the twilight of his career as a champion in Evolution. I don't have a problem with that. I do have a problem with Flair, though. No, the two of us rarely saw eye-to-eye. Remember those bounties I was talking about? NWA World heavyweight champion Harley Race came damn near to handing me a briefcase with $25,000 for putting Flair in the hospital just a few weeks before the very first Starrcade in 1983. Now you know why I was cheering so hard for my boy to put Bill Goldberg out of commission and collect that $100,000 from Triple-H. I wouldn't be surprised if Flair remembered what I did to him and came up with that idea.

I'll give this devil his due. Ric Flair is probably the greatest world heavyweight champion of all-time. Period. But I have one knock against Flair. The man is lazy. You can watch that 10-hour DVD all you want. But all you have to do is watch one Flair match and you've seen what you need to see. He has endurance, he's clever, and he knows how to a work a crowd. But the man will take the easiest way out every time. Forget a vertical suplex; he'd rather poke you in the eye.

Randy Orton almost seems to be looking around for Flair and seeking his approval during some matches (above). But instead of going for the kill himself (left), he's content to look for a way to cheat to win, just as the dirtiest player in the game usually does.

Forget about the pride of beating a man in the middle of the ring; he'd rather have his cronies do all his work for him. I don't mind a man who cheats to win. Even in his prime, Flair insisted on cheating no matter what. Even if he could beat a guy fair and square, he would still cheat. That became the number-one challenge to him. I don't care if it was Tommy Rich, Ronnie Garvin, Sam Houston, or the Mulkeys. He wanted to show he could beat the system. And all that cheating made him vulnerable.

Flair always brags that he's a 16-time world champion. That means he lost the belt more than anybody in history. If Flair spent more time keeping his skills sharp, maybe he would have been the NWA champion for five or six years straight, instead of losing it every few months. Flair was at his best when he tried to wrestle clean. If you look at his matches against Harley Race, Rick Steamboat, and even Vader, I think you'll agree.

Frankly, I don't care for Flair's influence on Randy. I'm convinced that Ric Flair is gonna ruin my boy! As of now, Flair is constantly cheating to wring every drop of what's left of his career. If he was helping to prepare Randy for Flair-Steamboat-quality matches, then I wouldn't have a problem. Instead, Flair is using Randy as a crutch, a modern-day Arn Anderson. He's back in Horseman mode. No disrespect to Arn, but I have greater aspirations for Randy. He's capable of being more than Flair's enforcer. And he doesn't need to show anyone he can beat the system just for the hell of it.

Just take a look at how Randy beat Rob Van Dam for the Intercontinental title at Armageddon. Randy had given Van Dam a DDT and scored three near-falls. Randy was just one big move away from putting Van Dam away for good. Van Dam climbed to the top rope, but Randy was still way too fresh to stay down for a frog splash at that point. Then, all of a sudden, Flair jumps up waving some kind of foreign object and distracts Van Dam and the referee. Randy, who was already getting to his feet, knocked Van Dam off the rope and stunned him with the RKO. End of story. Randy won the

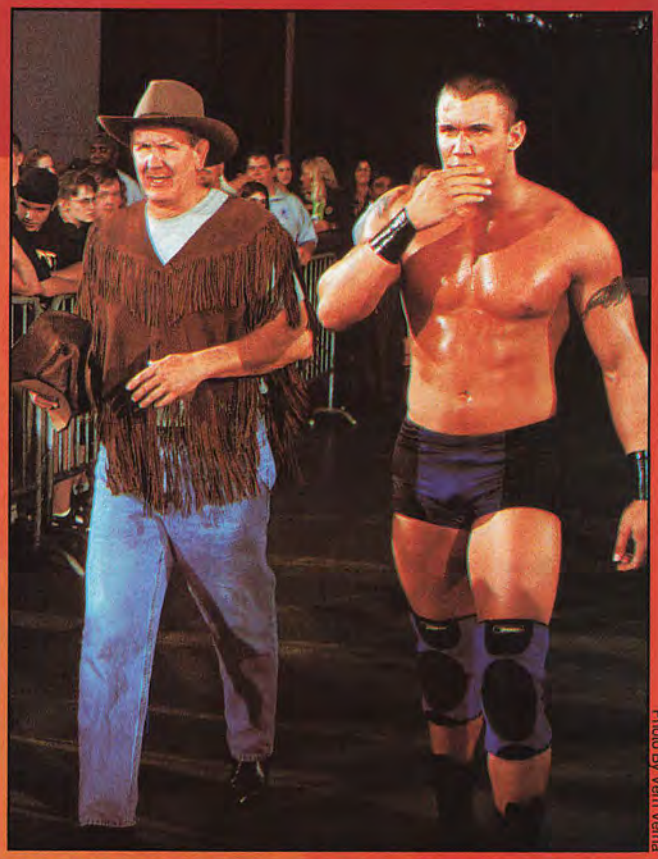
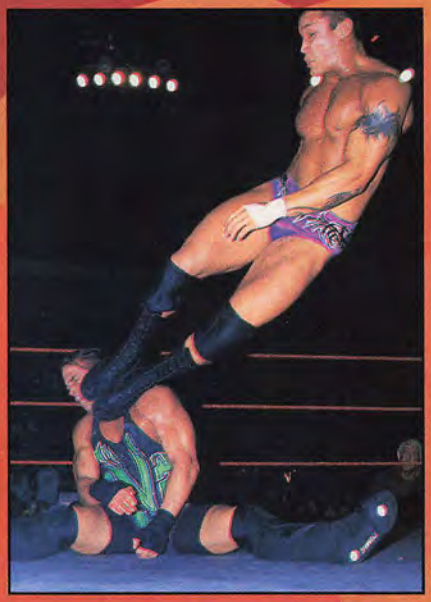


Photo By Vern Verna

Bob Orton isn't preaching that his son must never break the rules. Heck, he even accompanied his son to the ring a few times in OVW (above) and helped him win matches. But it bothers him when someone like Mick Foley, who had to hand Randy the I-C belt at Armageddon (below), takes Randy to task for being such an arrogant cheater.



Connecting with a dropkick to RVD's jaw as he is sitting on the mat—now that's a very innovative and very effective move. It's not like Randy Orton hasn't shown that he has the athletic skill to win big on his own merits.

Intercontinental title.

But Randy's well-earned victory is considered tainted. Everybody is looking at him as a world-class cheater now, even though nobody got hit with a foreign object in that match. Flair was just jumping up and down with something in his hand. That's not even against the rules. But Flair had to get himself involved in the finish somehow. He's greedy like that. Look at it this way: Randy is a former U.S. Marine, he bench-presses 400 pounds, and he had a 36-4 record and scored the most pinfalls in his conference as a wrestler in high school. He's 10 years younger than Van Dam. He could have pinned him cleanly and became an overnight sensation. Yet Flair had to cheat. The scary part is that Randy didn't seem to mind.

If he's around Flair much longer, Randy's first instinct will be to look to the outside for help instead of maybe shifting his weight for a quick pin or hitting the right suplex at the right time. Flair already has him thinking that way.

I'm being consistent here. My dad, Bob Sr., keeps telling Randy to walk the straight-and-narrow because every grandfather wants his grandson to be a Boy Scout. I tell Randy that he has to bend the rules from time to time. But you have to master the rules before you can break them. I was a clean, scientific wrestler early in my career. In 1973, I was named Rookie of the Year. *PWI* gave Randy the same award 28 years later.

Let me give you an anecdote. Bob Roop and I held the Florida tag team title in the mid-'70s, and we were sure raising some hell. We beat the snot out of Eddie and Mike Graham every night of the week. Then my dad came into the territory, saw what we were doing, and gave me a tongue-lashing like you've never heard. But within a few months, Roop was home with a bad knee, and Dad was helping me whip the Grahams again.

Randy, here's the bottom line. The Ortons will stick together whether you take my advice or not. You're already on your way to becoming a better wrestler than Bob Orton Sr. and Bob Orton Jr. And trust me, son, you can be a better wrestler than Ric Flair if you realize you don't always have to do it his way. □

"Flair is using Randy as a crutch, a modern-day Arn Anderson. He's back in Horseman mode. No disrespect to Arn, but I have greater aspirations for Randy. He's capable of being more than Flair's enforcer. And he doesn't need to show anyone he can beat the system just for the hell of it."

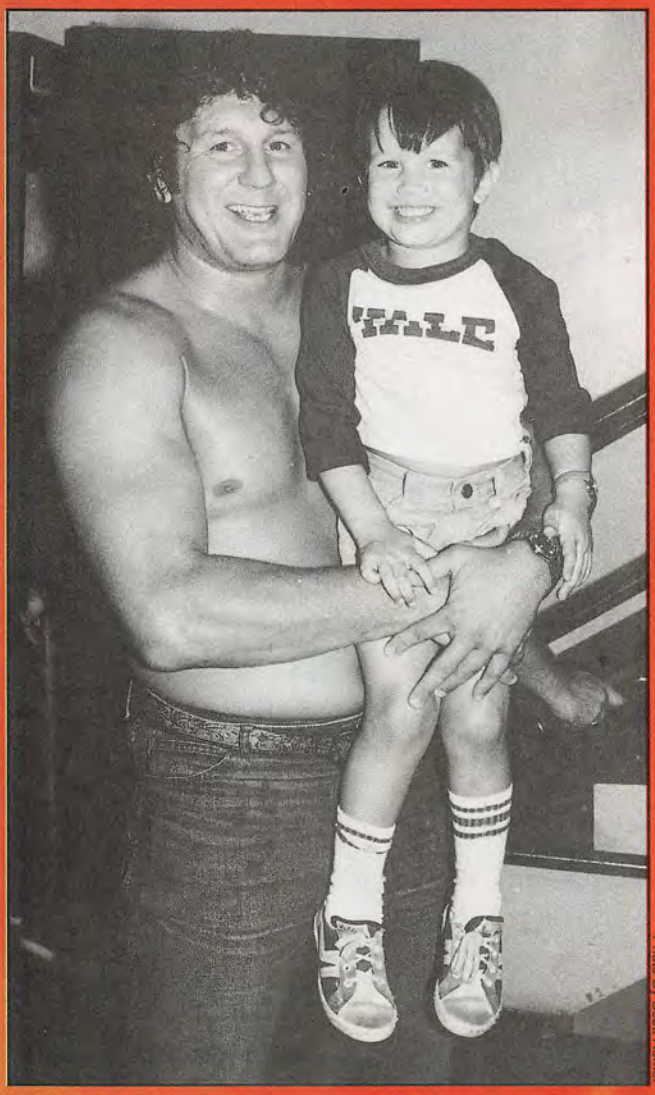
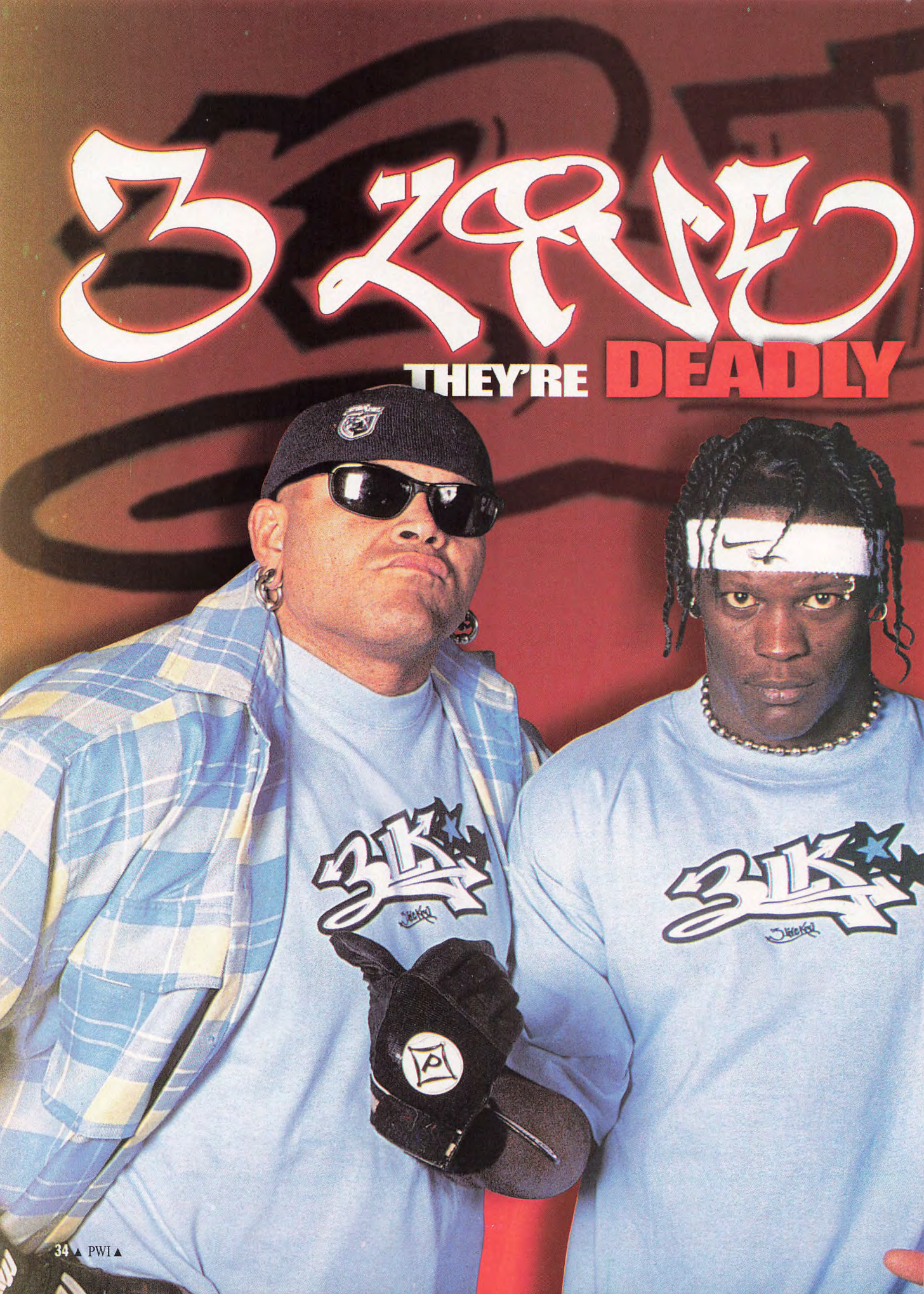


Photo By Scott Romer

Bob and Randy have always been tight, in spite of the hectic schedule that the father had to maintain. Bob is hoping that a public proclamation of his feelings will have a huge impact on his boy's career.

3 KRUEL

THEY'RE DEADLY



KRU

SERIOUS ABOUT HAVING FUN

Photos by Vern Verna

By Dan Murphy

SOME MEN SPEND their entire lives trying to climb to the top of the mountain, to make it to the pinnacle of their profession. Many get close enough to the peak to get a view of things before cruel fate sends them toppling down the mountainside, forcing them to start over.

Some get right back up and start the climb over from the bottom. Others stop, re-evaluate their goals, and walk away from the mountain altogether.

B.G. James, Konnan, and Ron Killings fit into the latter category. And they couldn't be happier.

"Been there, done that, got the T-shirt," James said when asked of his WWE run as part of DeGeneration X. Together with Billy Gunn, James won five WWE World tag team titles and feuded and teamed with some of the biggest names of the current era. James was released by WWE in January 2001 for substance abuse violations. He took about 18 months off to get his personal life back in order and to re-examine his priorities before debuting in NWA-TNA.

There, he eventually met up with Ron Killings, with whom he briefly teamed in WWE after the dissolution of DX. Killings was coming off a three-month-plus run as the NWA's first black heavyweight champion.

But after dropping the title to Jeff Jarrett, Killings was denied rematches. He began to believe that the promoters were keeping him away from the title and fell into a slump. Soon he was barely being featured on TNA PPVs at all.

Konnan could empathize with James and Killings. A legend in Mexico, Konnan's hostile falling-out with Mexican promoters got him blackballed from the Lucha Libre scene for a while. Despite being a founding member of NWO Wolfpac in WCW, Konnan was overlooked by WWE when the promotion bought WCW and began signing some of the talent.

Three men who had been at or near the top of various major promotions had been cast aside by promoters and all but forgotten by fans. So the kindred spirits formed a friendship and rediscovered why they got into wrestling in the first place: Wrestling, they remembered, can be a hell of a lot of fun.

"If I let every knuckleball life has thrown at me get me down, I'd be having heart attacks and strokes by now," James told *PWI*. "Life's too short to sweat the small stuff. 'The Sun-Tanned Superman,' 'The Magic Stick,' and 'B-Jizzle' just wanted to go ahead and do what they do and let the chips fall where they may."

Surprisingly, what on the surface might seem to be a lackadaisical attitude has been the key to 3 Live Kru's unlikely success. James, Konnan, and Killings began appearing in brief comedy skits in which they'd riff on current events or poke fun at one another. The Kru's skits became some of the most entertaining bits of the weekly TNA programs. Then 3LK began competing in six-man matches against largely no-name opponents, usually on TNA's syndicated *Xplosion* TV show. They weren't really a part of TNA storylines, but they were wildly popular with the fans at the Asylum and a staple of the free telecasts. It was all fun, no stress all the way.

"Ironically, they were getting the biggest push any of them had gotten in months—after they made a conscious decision to goof off rather than obsess over the pursuit of title belts. By learning to relax, 3LK was able to focus more on wrestling than on politics, and that bred success."

Though he is still an underrated technician on the mat (left and above), Konnan gets the least ring time of the three members of 3 Live Kru. He's okay with that. "The Kru's all about rolling with the punches life gives you and riding out the storm," he says.

Next thing you know, 3LK was getting booked on the PPV telecasts, and quietly becoming top contenders to the tag team title. Ironically, they were getting the biggest push any of them had gotten in months—after they made a conscious decision to goof off rather than obsess over the pursuit of title belts. By learning to relax, 3LK was able to focus more on wrestling than on politics, and that bred success.

In a way, their goofball antics distracted other teams from the talent 3LK possessed. James was one of WWE's biggest stars of the late-1990s. Konnan was one of WCW's biggest stars of the late-1990s. And Killings was the man many analysts thought would become NWA-TNA's first major breakout sensation. Surely, any combination of the three could form a championship-caliber team, yet teams like Swinger and Simon Diamond and America's Most Wanted treated the Kru like a comedy act, which, to be honest, they were.

But the 3LK guys were the only ones laughing when they defeated Swinger, Diamond, and Glenn Gilberti to win the vacant NWA tag team title on the night before Thanksgiving. Though James and Killings typically defend the belts, technically, any two members of 3LK can make title defenses. Now the comedy act that the matchmakers forgot about has a stranglehold on the tag division. Even more impor-

For a long time, B.G. James and his mates were given matches on *TNA Xplosion* against unheralded foes like Matt Vandal. They didn't complain. They had the same outlook then that they've had since capturing the NWA tag title.

tantly, they could affect the balance of power in NWA-TNA.

In recent weeks, Jarrett, the NWA champ, has issued an ultimatum to the locker room—you're either with him, or against him. Jarrett promises that things will change once the sides are drawn, and 3LK is sitting on the fence chuckling. Given James' storied history with Jarrett, as well as Konnan and Killings' experience as heels, 3LK could make valuable allies for Jarrett. If they stay in the fans' good graces, however, they could partner with D-Lo Brown, Raven, and A.J. Styles to battle Team Jarrett.

Killings drills Vampiro with a brainbuster suplex. He and James' run as the top tag team in the NWA might not last long, or perhaps it will go on for a year or more. Think they lose sleep worrying about that? Maybe in the past, but not know.

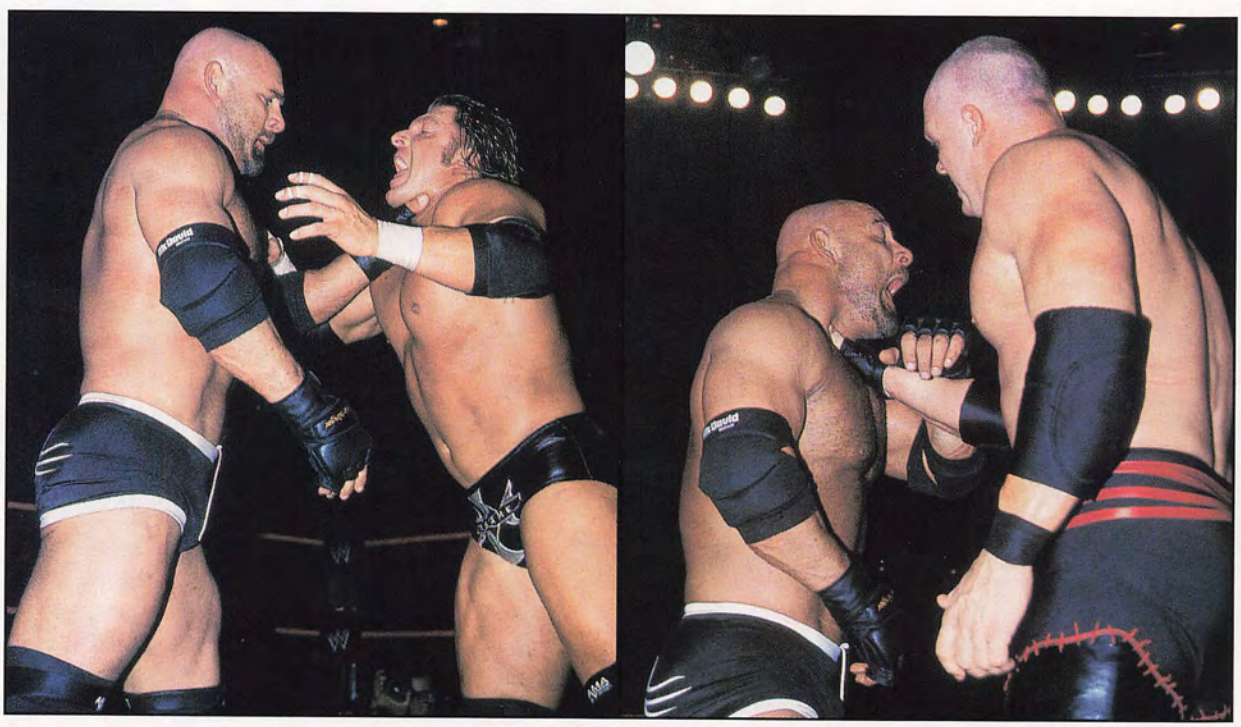
That could mean Killings will finally get his long-awaited rematch. It could also mean vindication for James and Konnan, who were unceremoniously cast aside/snubbed by WWE not long ago.

For three guys concentrating on having fun, they're in a controlling position in TNA. But that doesn't mean 3 Live Kru is going to change its approach.

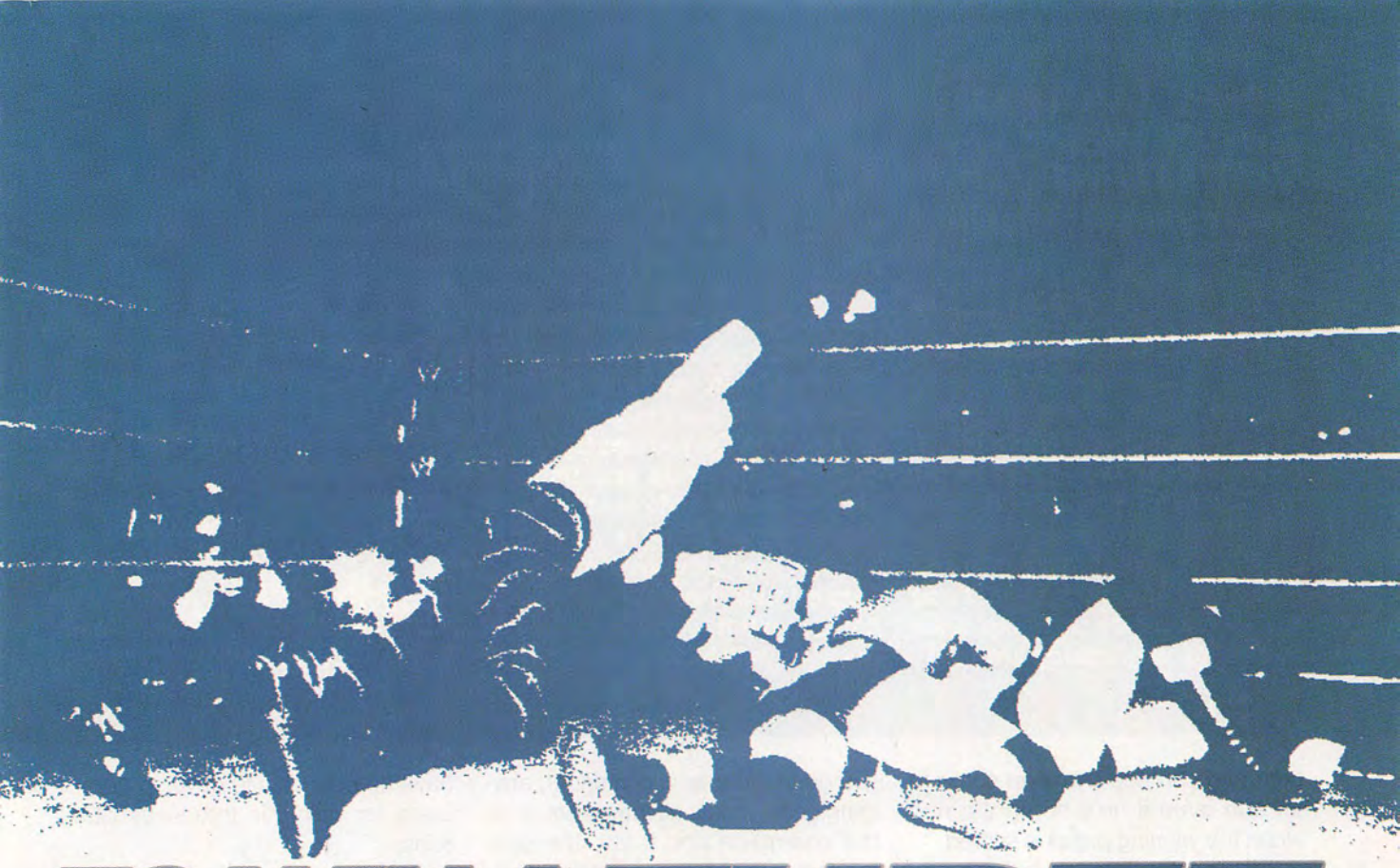
"I haven't been around this business as long as 'K-Dogg' or 'White Bread,' but I've learned a lot over the past few years," Killings said. "I learned that you can't take a damn thing for granted. Just because you're the best wrestler doesn't mean you get your title shot. No one's gonna watch your back except for you and your friends. Once I learned to stop worrying about titles and just winning the matches in front of me, my career took off. If we have more fun with Jarrett, we'll beat down Styles and Raven. If we have more fun with Styles, we'll kick the snot out of Jarrett. No skin off my nose either way."

"I look at [Chris] Harris and [James] Storm, and I see that dude from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off.* You know, that uptight kid who was always sweatin' his dad, yo," Konnan said. "Everyone's all uptight 'cause they say they were robbed or being held down or whatever other excuse they got. I used to get that way myself, and it did nothing but get me down. The Kru's all about rolling with the punches life throws at you and riding out the storm. Maybe it'll take us to the penthouse, maybe it'll take us to the poorhouse. But we sure as hell ain't about to sweat the ride." □

THERE'S NO ONE WAY



One minute Goldberg had Triple-H by the throat in hopes of finishing him off in the main event of Armageddon (above left) ... and the next, Kane, the third man in the three-way for the Raw title, had Goldberg set up for what would be a match-turning choke-slam (above right). Strategy, timing, and luck are important in every three-way.



TO WIN A THREE WAY

Wrestlers Are Still Searching For The Best Way

By Liz Hunter

BILL GOLDBERG IS not the sort of person who asks others for advice very often. However, if he really wanted to walk out of the Armageddon pay-per-view with the Raw title still around his waist, he probably should have sat down and had a heart-to-heart chat with Smackdown's Kurt Angle.

Angle could have told Goldberg all he needed to know about three-way matches. Angle wrestled his first big three-way match way back at WrestleMania XVI against Chris Jericho and Chris Benoit. That match had a rather unusual stipulation: Angle, who held both the Intercontinental and the European title at the time, would put both championships on the line in consecutive falls. As it turned out, Benoit beat Jericho for the first fall to claim the I-C title, and Jericho bested Benoit for the second fall to take the European title. Even though Angle was never pinned and didn't submit, he still lost both of his titles.

That's the thing about three-way matches—they fly in the face of traditional title defenses, in which the champion has a natural advantage. In three-way matches, the champion is at a distinct disadvan-

WHEN TAG TEAM BOUTS WERE WRESTLING'S NEW INNOVATION

By Red Bastien

I remember back in the late-1950s and early-1960s when tag team competition was wrestling's big breakthrough. Of course, there were always the purists who turned up their noses about tag team wrestling and said wrestling should always be one man against one man. The critics said tag team wrestling was taking integrity away from the sport. After all, you would never see tag team boxing matches or tag team wrestling on the amateur mats.

But I was a young man back then, and I could see that tag team wrestling was more than just a fad. It was a separate art form. It required a whole new approach that made matches more exciting.

First of all, there was the choice of a partner. Do you just tag with a good friend, or do you find the person whose style best complements yours? Being in a tag team is a lot like being in a marriage: Sometimes the best of friends can't make it work. A lot of the guys—myself included—ended up

Red & Lou Bastien

tage and can see his reign come to an end even if he's not in the ring when the winning pinfall is scored.

"The best way to win a three-way match is to not get roped into signing for one of them, especially if you're a champion," Angle said recently. "There's really no perfect way to prepare. You're constantly getting blindsided, and at any moment, someone else can decide your fate. I hate going in there as a champion, but if you go in there as a contender, anything goes. It puts all the pressure on the champion and it lets the contenders concentrate on doing their thing and protecting themselves."

Three-way matches have become common in recent years, and that has forced wrestlers to develop new strategies for surviving what often amounts to a two-on-one mugging. However, due to the unstable dynamic of these bouts, wrestlers have been unable to develop decent plans for victory in three-way situations.

Three-way matches first became popular in the mid-1990s in ECW, where they were known as three-way dances. ECW's first PPV, Barely Legal on April 13, 1997, featured a three-way dance between The Sandman, Stevie Richards, and Terry Funk that Funk won to earn an immediate shot against then-cham-

Even though he choke-slammed Goldberg and probably should have won the Raw title at Armageddon, Kane got knocked out of the ring and couldn't quite recover in time to break up "The Game's" final pin of Goldberg. Earlier, though, he stopped Goldberg from pinning Helmsley.

teaming with family: brothers, cousins, what have you. You had to be sure you could trust the guy in your corner, and sometimes you were never 100 percent sure.

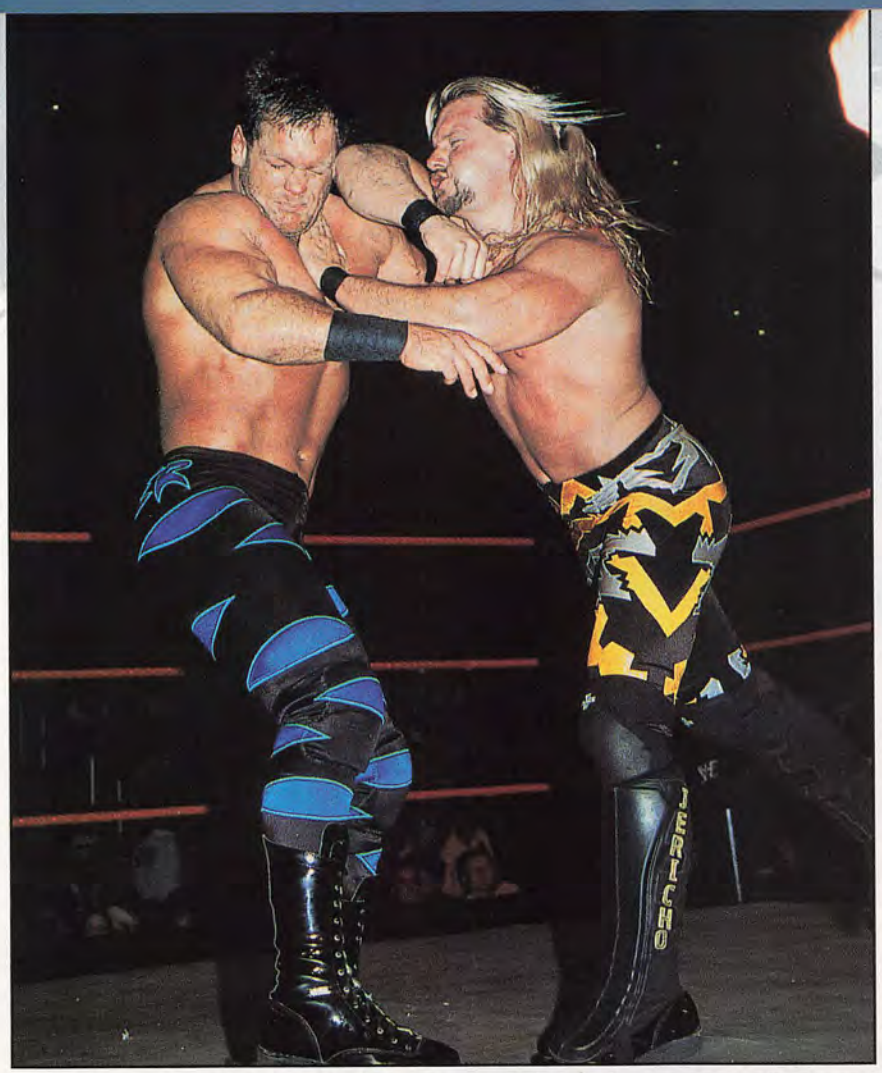
It may seem hard to believe now, but it was also difficult to figure out when you should tag out back then. As a singles wrestler, you were accustomed to wrestling for 20 to 30 minutes per night. You might wrestle a good 10 minutes before getting tired and wanting to tag out. We soon began to realize that it wasn't smart to have one guy tiring himself out and then making the tag. It was better to do like hockey players do. Get out there, do your thing for a minute or two, and then make a change and let your partner get in the ring. That kept both wrestlers fresh and resulted in fast-paced matches. Most teams had a ring general in charge of getting the pin and an enforcer whose job it was to just beat the other team down.

Things were so exciting back in those days because the art of tag team wrestling was still so new. You had the big bruisers teaming up and just beating guys up. You had the older veterans who didn't want to go 30 minutes a night anymore. You had the young bucks like myself who were trying to show everyone else up. It was a really dynamic time period.

What made tag team wrestling work is that it didn't stray too far from the basic premise of wrestling or sport: one man (or team) against the other. You still had rules. It wasn't four guys in the ring at once. I think wrestling can always evolve, but it needs to keep those basic elements of personal combat and rules in place.

It makes me happy to see that tag team wrestling continues to thrive today. I knew we were on to something good.

(Red and Lou Bastien won the WWWF U.S. tag team title three times during 1960. Red currently serves as president of the Cauliflower Alley Club.)



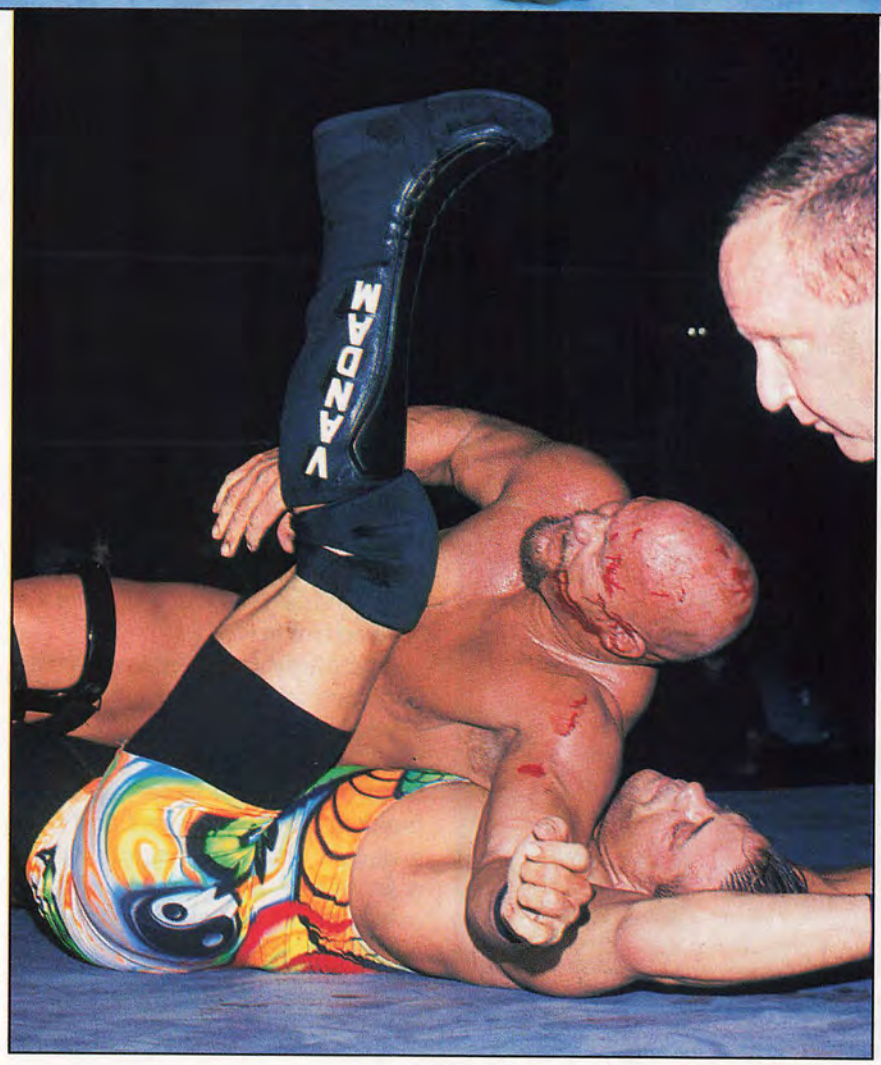
Four years ago at WrestleMania, Chris Jericho and Chris Benoit gave us two falls of splendid action. And both came out of the match with a title. Too bad it was Kurt Angle who lost both titles in that three-way ... without getting pinned or tapping out once.

pion Raven. Funk won that three-way by simply outbrawling Richards and Sandman. But Funk didn't master the art of the three-way match. At ECW's second PPV, Hardcore Heaven, Funk dropped the belt to Shane Douglas in another three-way match that also featured Sabu.

Douglas wrestled a more conservative style in that match than Funk had employed at Barely Legal. Douglas treated the match like a battle royal, allowing Sabu and Funk to injure each other while he rested, and then attacking when clear openings presented themselves. Douglas' strategy paid off, but that was largely because Sabu and Funk got so carried away in their crusade to maim each other. Douglas' cooler head and sense of ring generalship allowed him to win.

Three-way matches have proven appealing to WWE matchmakers for several reasons. First, the nature of the matches allows a wrestler on the cusp of the main event picture to break into the main event and have a decent shot at winning a title. It also allows greater flexibility in matchups, as well as the insertion of a third face to spice up a tired feud.

WWE first experimented with the idea with a fatal four-way elimination match for the vacant World title that



No matter how Steve Austin approached a three-way with The Undertaker and Kane for his WWF World title at Break Down in 1998 (above), he wasn't likely to win what was really a glorified handicap match. He was a bit more shrewd when he won a three-way against Rob Van Dam and Kurt Angle three years later (left).

saw Bret Hart outlast Steve Austin, The Undertaker, and Vader for the win on February 16, 1997. WWE's first big three-way match for the World title came in September 1998, when Austin faced Undertaker and Kane at Break Down. Austin—like Funk at Barely Legal—fought valiantly against both men, but was pinned by Kane and Undertaker simultaneously, forcing the World title to be held up.

From that point on, three-way matches became standard fare on WWE cards, including three-way matches for the women's, Intercontinental, and tag team titles. Though they've been a staple of WWE PPVs for more than a half-decade now, very few clear patterns have emerged. The champion is still at a decided disadvantage when his belt is on the line, but it's hardly impossible for a champion to come out on top. In fact, two men who have learned as much about three-way

dances as anyone in the business have managed to do just that.

Austin's biggest three-way victory came at the 2001 King of the Ring PPV, where he successfully defended the World title against Benoit and Jericho. Most analysts had all but written off Austin's championship reign, but he managed to claw his way through that match and escape with his title.

"Benoit and Jericho were tag team partners. For all intents and purposes, I was going in there in a two-on-one match," Austin recalled. "Hell, I tried to be as obnoxious as possible. When Benoit hit me, I told him Jericho was hitting me harder. When Jericho kicked me, I told him Benoit was kicking me harder. The two of them started competing with one another, and that gave me the opportunity to steal a pin over Benoit."

So is that the best strategy for a heel champion—to create dissension among the two contenders and make a move when something opens up?

"That's just what worked for me during that one particular match," Austin said. "I doubt it would work if I did it today. It wasn't so much a strategy as a survival mechanism. I did what I had to do to come out of that match with the belt. Luckily, it worked."

"'There are no guarantees with three-way matches. The only thing you can do is get the best of one man at a time and then either go for the cover or take a powder and wait for your opening. You have to be aggressive, cautious, fearless, patient, and wily all at the same time.'" —Triple-H

Austin also survived a three-way match against Angle and Rob Van Dam at 2001's No Mercy PPV. That time, Austin wrestled more aggressively and worked to weaken Van Dam throughout the match. Angle also beat on Van Dam, inadvertently creating an opening for Austin to score the pinfall on RVD and retain the World title.

WWE's other reigning master of the multi-opponent match is Triple-H. Technically, his WrestleMania XVI match against Rock, Big Show, and Mankind was a fatal four-way *elimination* match, but Hunter's strategy was basically the same as the one he used at Armageddon.

"You can only worry about one man at a time," Triple-H explained. "There are no guarantees with three-way matches. The only thing you can do is get the best of one man at a time and then either go for the cover or take a powder and wait for your opening. You have to be aggressive, cautious, fearless, patient, and wily all at the same time. Of course, no one can do that like 'The Game.'"

Boasting aside, Triple-H's advice may seem contradictory, but it also seems like the closest thing to true strategy anyone can employ for a three-way match. Until someone comes up with *the* key to mastering the three-way match, look for them to remain a confusing, chaotic, yet compelling PPV staple for many years to come. □

Credit ECW and Paul Heyman for making three-way dances all the rage in the 1990s. Here, Shane Douglas, Sabu, and Terry Funk all do their best to find a way to win one. There is still no definitive strategy to employ in such a match.

TO FIRST

John Cena has no plans to stop spending a lot of time working on edgy raps through which he can insult opponents ...

FROM BAD-ASS RAPPER TO CLASS GRAPPLER

HOW KURT ANGLE CHANGED JOHN CENA FOREVER!

By Will Welsh

RIC FLAIR HAD Rick Steamboat. Hulk Hogan had Randy Savage. Bret Hart had Shawn Michaels. Steve Austin had The Rock. The Rock had Mick Foley. In every wrestler's career, he comes across at least one opponent who changes the way he approaches the sport. Whether it's because of certain in-ring tactics, all-around wrestling skill, or overall attitude and approach, some part of the wrestler's makeup makes an impression on his opponent and leaves him indelibly changed for the better.

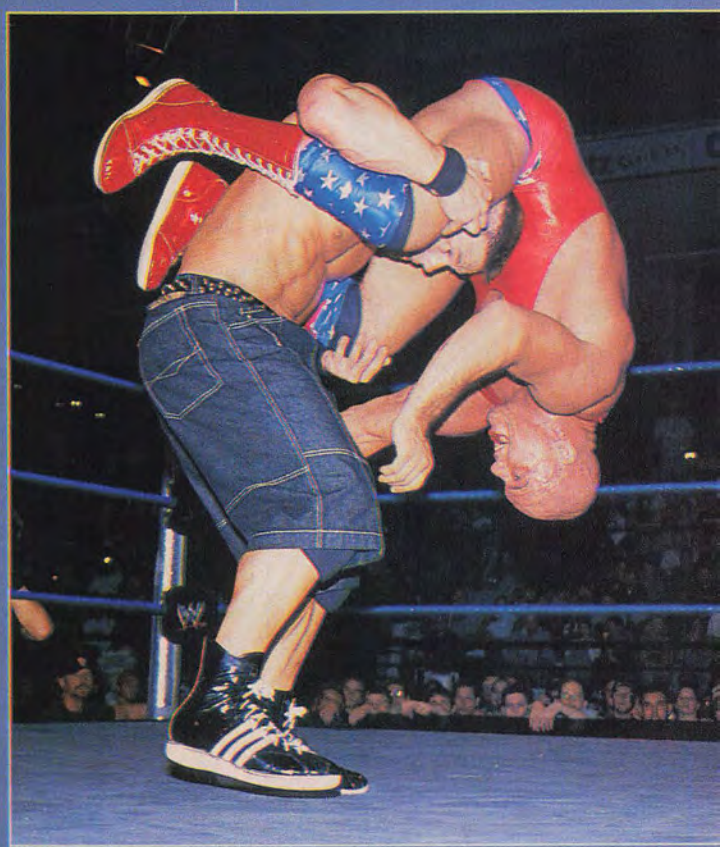
Some of the time, this special opponent is encountered when the wrestler is already established. All of the names listed above, in fact, found their definitive opponent when they were already entrenched at the top. They had already held world championships, and these opponents represented a new threat to which they had to adjust.

Steamboat taught Flair that he had to be at his best every night he stepped in the ring, that all that stylin' and profilin' on its own wasn't enough to make him an all-time great.

Savage taught Hogan about intensity and to humble himself by forcing him to recognize greatness in someone other than himself.

Michaels forced Hart to recognize when it is time to wrestle and when it is time to fight.

The Rock taught Austin that gamesmanship can win matches.



... but thanks to his feud and subsequent partnership with Kurt Angle, he is spending just as much time working to become the best wrestler he can possibly be.

Cena was just a bit overmatched by Angle in the ring at times back in the fall. There's no shame in that, though. Angle can outclass just about everyone on the mat. But Cena learned a lot from his experiences.

Foley taught The Rock that sometimes brutality is a necessity.

Whether you know it or not, we just witnessed the birth of another of these special, life-changing rivalries, except this time an established superstar taught a young up-and-comer a very serious lesson. John Cena might be musclebound and street-wise, he may have all the charisma and physical tools necessary to become one of the sport's top wrestlers, but it wasn't until Mr. Thuganomics stood across the ring from former WWE champion Kurt Angle that he learned there's more to wrestling than looking tough, talking tough, and acting tough. Angle taught Cena that if he wants to enter the sport's elite, his toughness has to be tempered with respect, and that hard-hitting words have to be backed up with even harder-hitting actions.

Most of all, Angle taught Cena that while being a bad-ass rapper is great, when most of your money is made wrestling matches, being a first-class grappler is even better.

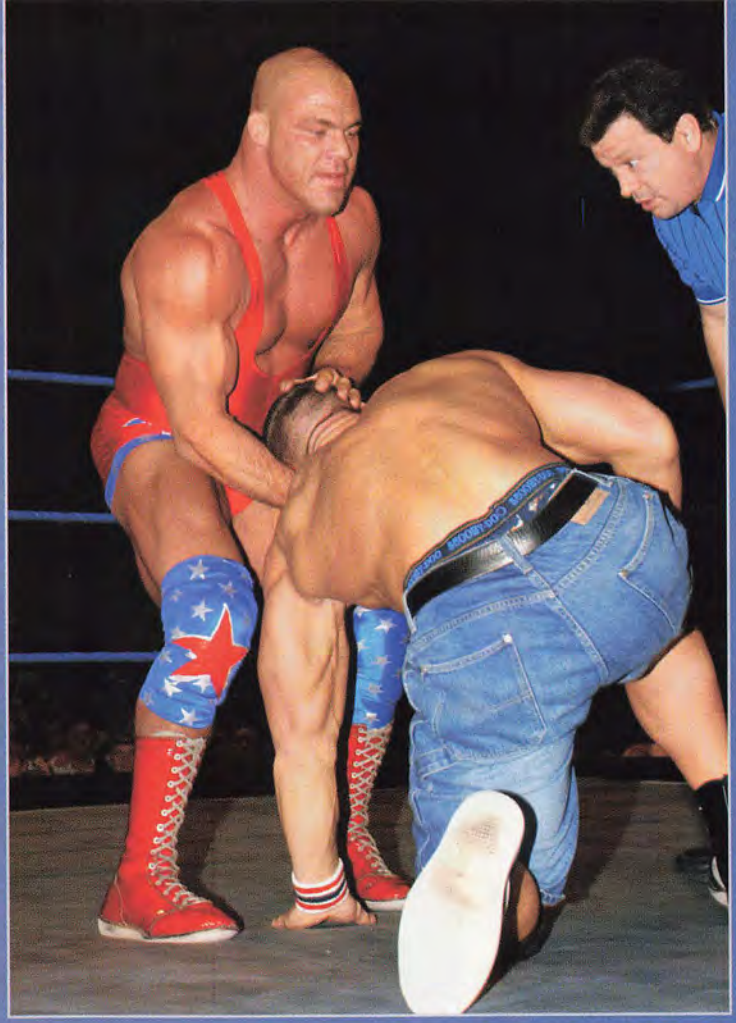
"John Cena is a great talent, a real find for WWE," said Smackdown play-by-play announcer Michael Cole. "He has so many intangibles that most people in WWE believe he's destined for greatness. But even with all of his natural ability and charisma, he still has lessons to learn, and I think of all of his opponents, he's learned the most from Kurt Angle. Here's a guy who,

The 2003 Angle-Cena matches will not go down as technical masterpieces (left and below). That doesn't mean they won't be viewed as historically important in years to come.

despite winning an Olympic gold medal, makes sure to humble himself around other people in the industry who have seniority. Plus there's no one smoother in the ring. I think that when Cena was forced to wrestle him—and then later forced to team with him—he saw that side of Angle and it surprised him. With Cena becoming more of a fan favorite, I believe you're seeing the end result."

So what exactly did Cena see in Angle? Well, for one, he saw Angle's professionalism. Angle is all business once the opening bell rings. And he isn't a guy who usually says one thing and then does another. He says what he means, and very rarely does he try to conceal his true motivations. Cena, on the other hand, had been crafty and manipulative. He would work people over until the odds were in his favor, and then he would strike them at their weakest point. An effective way to win matches? Most definitely. An effective way to curry respect with others? Most definitely *not*. Being a person who views himself as an entertainer *and* an athlete, Cena wanted both. He craved balance.

"Cena considers himself a complete wrestler," said Smackdown backstage interviewer Josh Matthews. "He wants success, both in and out of the ring. I think he took a look at Angle and everything that he's accomplished and saw where he needed to change and improve. It's like wrestling Angle showed him that while he has come a long way since joining WWE, he could even get that much better. And I think we all know John is really good already."



We don't doubt that we will be seeing Angle vs. Cena again in the months and years to come. Next time we see it, Angle should count on being faced with a much stiffer test. And he'll have himself to blame in part.

No doubt one thing Cena saw in Angle was his dedication. Prior to his entrance into WWE, Angle dedicated his life to amateur wrestling and eventually captured an Olympic gold medal. Then, after a few years away from the sport, he dedicated himself to becoming the greatest professional wrestler he could be—and he quickly became one of the top two or three talents in the business. It looked like an effortless transition, but it wasn't. Angle made it look that way because he worked so hard.

How could Cena not respect a man who displays such absolute commitment? How could he not want to dedicate himself even more wholly to the sport aspect of wrestling after meeting Angle one-on-one?

"Cena is motivated," said Cole. "He wants to be the best at what he does, but he's still relatively new to wrestling. Standing across the ring from Angle did him a world of good, because he got to compete against someone who exudes such complete dedication and love for the sport. My opinion is that once you've wrestled Kurt Angle, you can't help but stand in awe of the dedication and competitiveness that he brings to the ring. He wins you over regardless of whether he beats you or doesn't beat you, and I think he won Cena over in a very big way."

Cena might have been frustrated with Angle at the outset of their feud, but it's obvious that as the feud wore on, Cena had grown to respect the Olympian. Sure, Cena is still going to rap, and he's still going to flex his muscles at any punk who comes jawing his way, but from now on, he's going to do it with a bit of a different edge. If you look past the chain around his neck and his array of throwback jerseys, what you'll find is a young, impressionable wrestler who is just beginning to find out who he is and, more importantly, who he wants to be.

From now on, a small part of him will always want to be a lot like Kurt Angle. □

"Cena might have been frustrated with Angle at the outset of their feud, but it's obvious that as the feud wore on, Cena had grown to respect the Olympian. Sure, Cena is still going to rap ... but from now on, he's going to do it with a bit of a different edge."

A WELCOME JAPANESE

ROH fans in Philly were beyond thrilled when they finally got to see The Great Muta at night's end, in a hard-hitting tag team match with Chris Daniels (below). They also saw sportsmanship, with C.M. Punk, Kazushi Miyamoto, Tomoaki Honma, and Colt Cabana raising one another's hands after their match (left).

Photos by George Tahinos

INVASION!

ALL-JAPAN/ROH CO-PROMOTION WOWS U.S. CROWD

By Dan Murphy

TO THE ALL-Japan Pro Wrestling crew, it was a working vacation in the United States built around independent cards in Philadelphia on December 27 and San Antonio on December 28. For the most part, the mentality was "go in, put on a nice, quick match, and go check out the Liberty Bell or something." A Saturday in one of America's most historic cities followed by a flight to Texas for an even smaller show would be a nice little break between All-Japan tours.

In fact, prior to the card, All-Japan's biggest name—Keiji Muto—asked Ring of Honor promoter Rob Feinstein if he could wrestle the first match, allowing him to leave the arena early and giving him more time for sightseeing.

What the Japanese wrestlers didn't realize was that they weren't going to be relatively unknown supporting players on a card in front of a mere 200 fans (which they were the following night, when the same crew wrestled on a smaller independent show promoted by River City Wrestling). Instead, they were the featured attractions, and nearly 1,500 rabid fans—the largest crowd in ROH history—had packed the building to see them face Ring of Honor's best and brightest.

The audience was largely composed of educated wrestling fans and tape traders who were very familiar with the All-Japan talent and were excited to see them in person. The buzz from the crowd and the huge turnout energized the wrestlers to the point at which all talk of sightseeing and relaxation took a backseat to giving the fans what they came for—and maybe a little more.

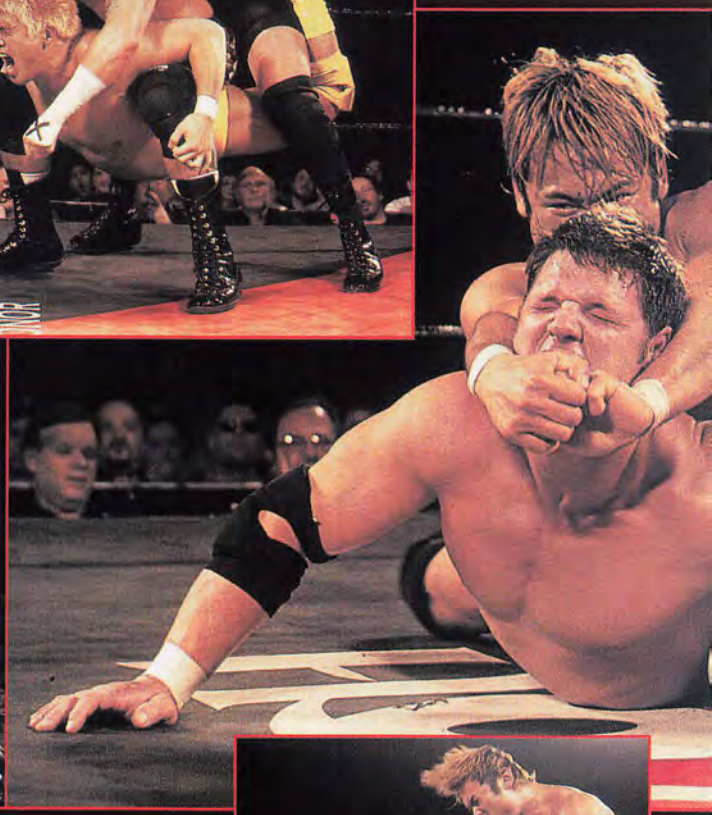
"WHILE NO PLANS HAVE BEEN FINALIZED, ALL-JAPAN AND ROH HAVE EXPRESSED INTEREST IN WORKING TOGETHER AGAIN IN THE FUTURE. THERE IS TALK THAT ROH AND AJPW MIGHT PROMOTE AN ANNUAL YEAR-END SUPERCARD IN THE U.S., PLUS ALL-JAPAN IS LIKELY TO BRING ROH TALENT TO JAPAN FOR CO-PROMOTIONAL CARDS."

A special matinee card featuring the likes of C.M. Punk, Sumie Sakai, The Carnage Crew, and others drew a respectable 500 fans. By the time the featured evening card began, the atmosphere was electric.

The show opened with Jay Briscoe facing "American Dragon" Bryan Danielson in a strategic technical contest. Danielson worked extensively on Briscoe's head and neck before putting him away with his cattle mutilation armlock submission.

In the second match, John Walters and Xavier ratcheted up the violence level in a brutal "fight without honor." Xavier and Walters never held back, using ladders and tables to batter one another. Xavier suffered a severe laceration and left puddles of blood on the ring apron. Matt Stryker defeated B.J. Whitmer in the finals of the Field of Honor Tournament in a methodical contest. And in a stiff encounter, Samoa Joe successfully defended the ROH title against Mark Briscoe.

Maybe Miamoto didn't expect Punk and Cabana to form such a cohesive team. He and Honma dropped the first AJPW vs. ROH match on the show.



Dan Maff attempts to knock Arashi off his feet with a chop, but as you can tell, he didn't have much success. He and Daniels did come pretty close to upsetting Arashi and Muta for the All-Japan tag title, however.

Following the intermission, the All-Japan portion of the show began, featuring AJPW wrestlers against ROH.

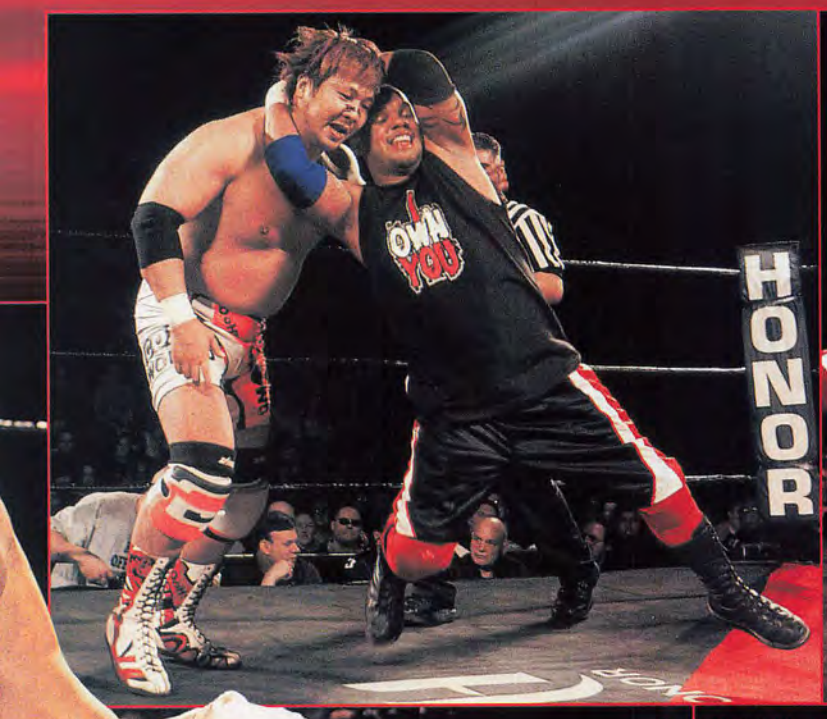
The Second City Saints claimed the first victory for Ring of Honor, as C.M. Punk and Colt Cabana defeated Kazushi Miyamoto and Tomoaki Honma (collectively known as Tumeric Storm) when Punk put Honma away with his Pepsi plunge finisher.

A.J. Styles received a hero's welcome by the fans and made it 2-0 in favor of ROH by defeating Kaz Hayashi via the Styles clash in a match many fans considered to be the most exciting of the night.

But the AJPW wrestlers didn't fly all the way to Philadelphia to be embarrassed. In the semi-main event, Homicide (with Low-Ki in his corner) squared off against his hero, Satoshi Kojima. Kojima pounded Homicide with chops and battered him on the floor before connecting with a vicious clothesline to score the pinfall. But in the end, there was one man the record-breaking crowd had come to see. Muto reprised an updated version of his role as The Great Muta, the face-painted character he introduced in the late-1980s in the World Class territory and further developed in WCW. During his previous American tours, Muta was always treated as the villain by most fans. On this night, when he was introduced by ring announcer Stephen DeAngelis, Muta received what has been called the loudest ovation in ROH history. And he was stunned.

Kaz Hayashi had A.J. Styles trapped in a version of the Crippler crossface (top), yet he couldn't make him tap. The former NWA champ also withstood some brutal kicks (above) before triumphing with a Styles clash.

"It was incredible. It was like The Rock or Hulk Hogan just walked into the building," said Brandon Grey, a fan from Cleveland who had come to the



Homicide got the best of Satoshi Kojima early in their stiff match (above left). But Kojima began to wear down his dangerous American foe as the match progressed (above right). A brutal clothesline finished off Homicide.

show with a group of fans on a chartered bus.

Muta and Arashi entered the ring to defend the AJPW tag title against The Prophecy, Christopher Daniels and Dan Maff (managed by Allison Danger). Prior to the match, DeAngelis read a proclamation by AJPW Commissioner Stan Hansen officially sanctioning the contest. The action went back and forth, with Muta blowing both green and red mist and hitting his signature moves, such as the Dragon screw and the power elbow, but with the younger Arashi being the workhorse for the Japanese team. However, Daniels and Maff held their own against the champions from The Land of the Rising Sun with the "Fallen Angel" positioning Muta for a moonsault. However, Muta recovered and hit Daniels with a shining wizard—the move so many had been waiting to see—to take the fall.

After the match, Muta offered a handshake to The Prophecy. Daniels, a man notorious for his refusal to shake his opponents' hands, didn't accept. Instead—in a sign of respect and acknowledgement of custom—he, Maff, and Danger bowed to the All-Japan champs.

"I can't put into words what a tremendous success the card was," Feinstein said. "The Japanese talent truly appreciated the reception they received. It was a really special night, and I want to thank our fans and our wrestlers for putting on one of the greatest Ring of Honor shows ever."

While no plans have been finalized, All-Japan and ROH have expressed interest in working together again in the future. There is talk that ROH and AJPW might promote an annual year-end supercard in the U.S., plus All-Japan is likely to bring ROH talent to Japan for co-promotional cards.

"It was an honor to compete against such fine athletes and before such appreciative fans," Kojima said through an interpreter. "It is encouraging that fans are willing to accept foreigners for their talent, whereas in past generations, Japanese were always received as the enemy. Perhaps this can be a new era where talent and skill are more important than nationality."

The card was certainly a hit with the fans in attendance.

"You don't get many chances to see guys like Kojima and Muta in person, let alone against American wrestlers the caliber of Daniels, Maff, and Homicide," said fan Steve Genco. "This was the closest thing to a dream card I've ever seen. If they ever do this again, I can guarantee I'll be sitting at ringside with a smile on my face." □

A-Train turned in a solid performance against Chris Benoit at No Mercy, just as he did against The Undertaker at SummerSlam. But he's looking for more than solid PPV performances. He needs big PPV wins.

READY FOR A

It's Time For Everyone To Get Off A-Train's Back

By Will Welsh

SPORTS FANS ARE a fickle bunch. We tend to only remember the champions, the men and women who walk away with the phone call from the President and, eventually, the gold rings around their fingers. Very rarely do we remember who came in second. Very rarely do we remember the losers. We have no time to listen to their excuses and no inclination to remember their names, because we're too busy getting caught up in the revelry of a big win to want to mope in the misery of those left to deal with a championship *loss.*

Wrestling fans don't remember many losers, either. We don't care how they lost the match, who interfered on the opponent's behalf, or if the referee's lousy job of officiating played into the final outcome. At the end of the match, we're too busy cheering on the winner (or too busy booing him out of the building) to spend any time consoling the loser and committing his name or gutsy performance to memory.

It's the rare wrestler who gets remembered for a loss.

There are exceptions, of course. We might remember

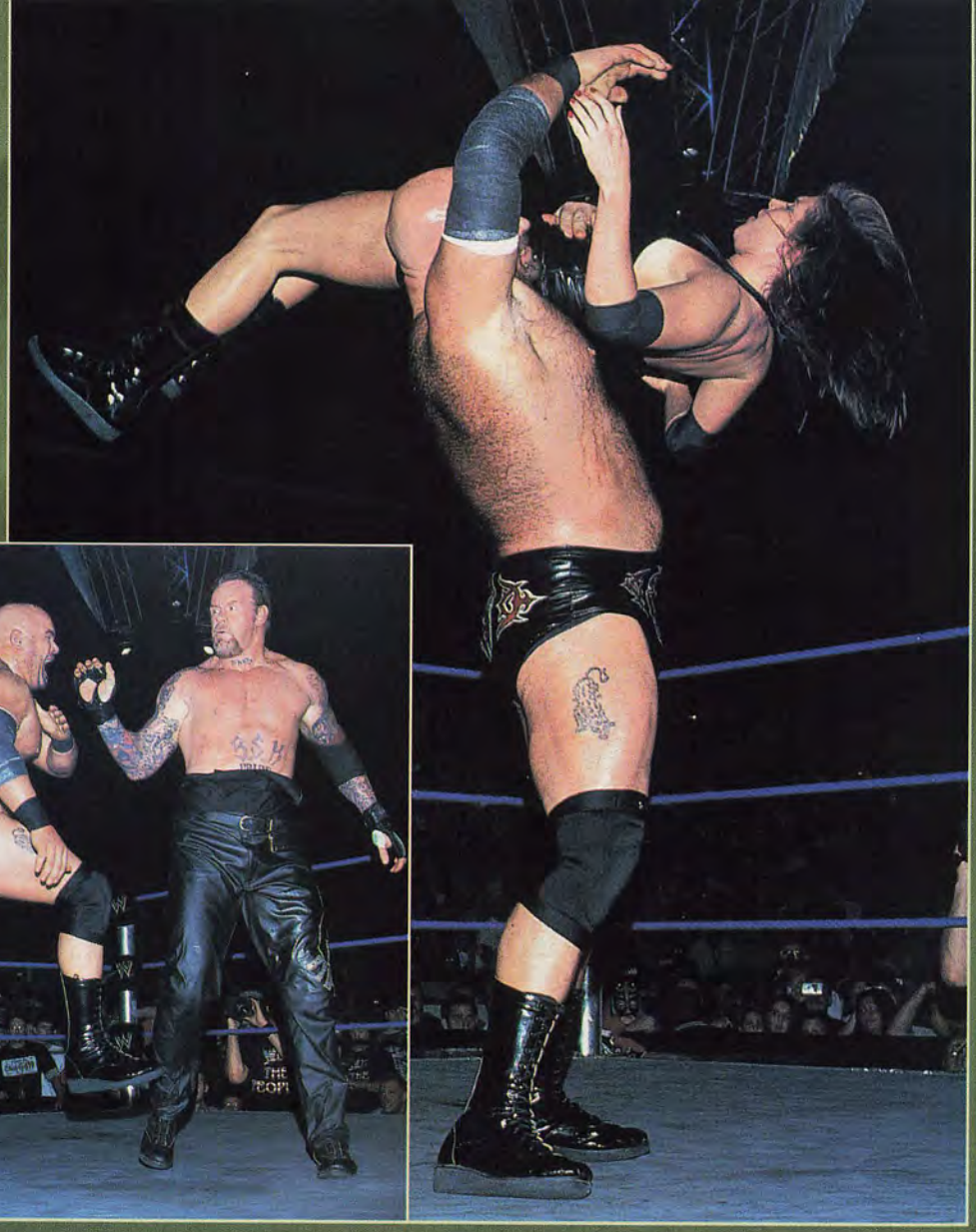
main EVENT

'All he has to do now is win. Sometimes, though, winning your first really big match is the hardest thing a wrestler will ever do. Not only do you have to have the talent, you have to be a little lucky—and A-Train hasn't been all that lucky lately.' —Tazz

who won what title from which wrestler, but even knowledge like that only sticks with us for a short time. For example, we all know that Bill Goldberg won his one and only Raw championship from Triple-H, but how many of us know who Bret Hart defeated to win his first WWF World championship? Many of us would take an educated guess and say Shawn Michaels—and we'd be wrong. Hart defeated Ric Flair to win his first WWF World championship, on October 12, 1992.

Losers don't make memories. Nor do they make headlines. Winners do.

There's a wrestler on the Smackdown roster who knows this all too well. He's had a few main events, been involved in some high-profile feuds, and has had more than a couple of shots at winning championship gold, yet fans hardly think about him when discussing Smackdown's top wrestlers and those wrestlers who are capable of dethroning Brock Lesnar for the Smackdown championship. Despite being one of the promotion's most consistent performers since his WWF debut in 1999, he's little more than an afterthought.



Train is big and strong enough to slug it out with Undertaker (above left). And Vince McMahon thought so highly of him this fall that he sent him after his daughter, Stephanie (above right). He is being given every chance to become a major player for Smackdown.

A-Train, though, is on the verge of changing things. Right now, he might be only one big pay-per-view win away from legitimate stardom.

"I'd say A-Train is ready," said Smackdown color commentator and former ECW World champion Tazz. "I've seen him mature as a wrestler in recent years. His skills are sharper than they've ever been, and he's more motivated than I've ever seen him. It why he's been given opportunities in the main events. All he has to do now is win. Sometimes, though, winning your first really big match is the hardest thing a wrestler will ever do. Not only do you have to have the talent, you have to be a little lucky—and A-Train hasn't been all that lucky lately. He's been getting the shots, but he just hasn't capitalized on them."

It's true, A-Train has been getting shots. A lot of them, in fact. One of A-Train's greatest opportunities to join Smackdown's regular roster of top tier wrestlers came at the 2003 SummerSlam pay-per-view. He had been feuding on and off with The Undertaker for months, and on the second-biggest WWE pay-per-view of the year, he finally got a chance to meet him one-on-one. It was his first chance to establish himself in the top tier and earn the respect of Smackdown's fan base. During the match, he surprised 'Taker with a well-timed Baldo bomb and even kicked of a pin

attempt after absorbing an Undertaker chair shot. As the match went on, we were actually rooting for the underdog. But then came a 'Taker choke-slam and the match was over—in less than 10 minutes.

Two months later, at No Mercy, A-Train lost yet another high-profile match, this one to Chris Benoit. And he didn't just lose that match to Benoit—he tapped out to the Crippler crossface.

Losing slows momentum. Losing by submission stops it dead in its tracks.

Then, to make matters even worse, one month after that at Survivor Series, A-Train had another setback. It was Team Lesnar (A-Train, Lesnar, Big Show, Matt Morgan, and Nathan Jones) against Team Angle (Kurt Angle, John Cena, Chris Benoit, Bradshaw, and Hardcore Holly), and A-Train was the first member of Team Lesnar eliminated. Thirty seconds into the match, he succumbed to a Bradshaw clothesline from hell.

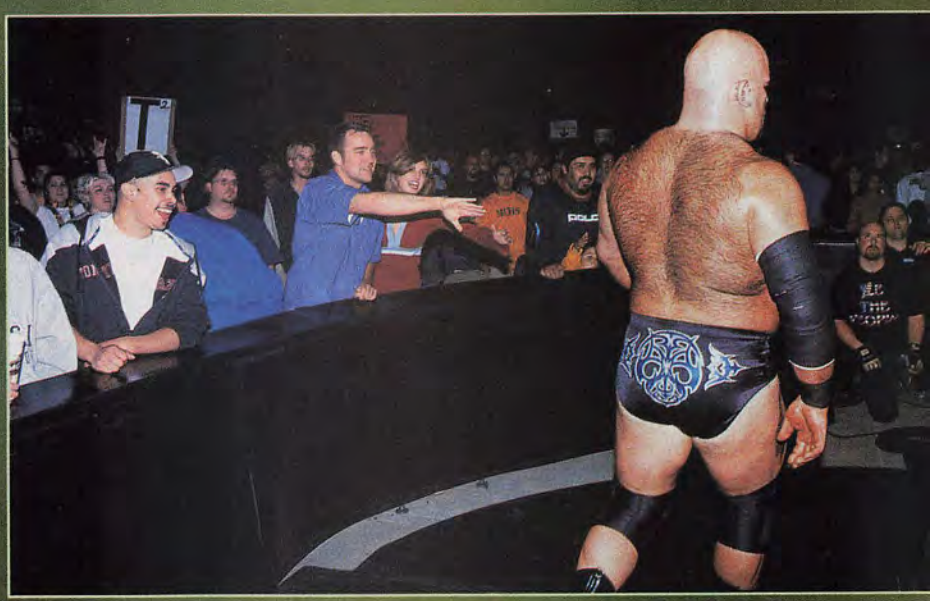
The loss to Benoit at No Mercy was especially tough for Train, as although he had his moments (above), it ended with him tapping out. As he watches the stars of young studs like John Cena (right) rise, he must wonder how long his window of opportunity will remain open.

Guess what! A 30-second pay-per-view defeat makes you the mayor of Loserville.

"A-Train is at a very crucial point of his career," observed Tom Pilliard, a *PWI* consultant who specializes in WWE. "If he's going to make the jump to the top tier, it's now or never. Cliche? Yes. But it's also true. He can't let all these recent pay-per-view losses set him back—and I don't think they will. It's not in his character to let anything get him down. He's battled through ridiculous characters and lack of fan support to find himself on the cusp on Smackdown's top tier. He's driven, probably more than most wrestlers. As long as his psyche holds up, he's going to get that win. He will be a main-eventer, and I think he'll be one sooner rather than later."

If you watch *Smackdown* regularly, there's a good chance that you're scoffing at Pilliard's assessment. You might think the editors of *PWI* were silly for even commissioning this story. You've seen A-Train struggle through the mid-card ranks, you've heard the silly chants of "Shave your back!" and heck, you might have even participated in one at a live event. While you'll admit that he A-Train has impressive size and strength, you're not quite sure his straightforward, power-based, old school wrestling style can get it done in this day and age of extreme daredevil tactics. You're just not sure he has what it takes to be more than a mid-carder.

We understand your argument, and while we're not suggesting it's totally devoid of merit, let us counter with this: The reason you question A-Train's ability to main event is you've never seen him do it. Once he does, you might just become a believer. The A-Train is finally ready to roll. □



Okay, it might help a little if A-Train shaved his back. If he did that, people might actually focus on what he's doing in the ring rather than his appearance.

the business page

By Harry Burkett

Wrestling is shining brightly ... For those fans in North America still yearning for a 24-hour wrestling channel, you will have to wait a while longer ... but the forecast is getting a little brighter. The Sunshine Network—a Florida-based sports cable station that is also available via subscription on DirecTV and The Dish Network—has put together a block of wrestling programming for Friday nights that was scheduled to take effect on February 6. NWA-TNA's *Xplosion* was slated for 10 p.m., the International Wrestling Association's weekly show emanating from Puerto Rico had secured the 11 p.m. time slot, and Major League Wrestling's *Underground TV* was set for midnight.

While the IWA and MLW have already been on the schedule for some time, TNA's deal with The Sunshine Network is new. *Xplosion* has been syndicated in some local markets for more than a year, and TNA is also negotiating to have the program added to Chicago's cable powerhouse, WGN-TV. The three-hour wrestling block isn't permanent, however, because MLW's *Underground TV,* which had been bumped from Monday nights due to college sporting events, was scheduled for a return to its original time slot on March 26.

But the wrestling action doesn't stop there. Florida's Maximum Pro Wrestling was set to debut its weekly program, *Maximum Impact,* on March 8. Women's Extreme Wrestling and King of the Cage, a mixed martial arts promotion, are two more wrestling shows that air on The Sunshine Network.

With so many independent promotions trying to get more exposure for their television programs, it's not surprising that the demand for a 24-hour wrestling channel still exists. The aptly titled Wrestling Channel, which is available via satellite providers in Europe, and Japan's Samurai TV both feature current indy shows in addition to classic programs from the old territorial days.

WWE has made a concerted effort to accumulate the rights to as much vintage footage as possible, including WCW, ECW, the AWA, and Jim Crockett Promotions. CEO Linda McMahon has acknowledged that WWE has an interest in launching a 24-hour channel, and has hired an executive specifically commissioned to figure out ways to turn those classic shows into easy profits. But the countless mentions of the "WWF" in classic footage could cause more legal headaches with the World Wide Fund For Nature, and would require countless hours of editing to expunge all those verbal and visual references.

As it stands, WWE seems content with repackaging classic footage in DVDs, such as *The Ultimate Ric Flair Collection,* and prefers to make shows

Shark Boy (shown against Delirious) is featured fairly regularly on NWA-TNA's syndicated show, *Xplosion.* Now those with access to The Sunshine Network should be able to see that program every week. Sunshine has turned into quite the wrestling channel.

The Rock was back in promotion/plugging mode in January when he began doing press for his latest movie, *Walking Tall*. He appeared on *American Idol* host Ryan Seacrest's new talk show, but unfortunately, he didn't stage a third "Rock concert."

available directly on pay-per-view rather than risk overexposure. Sure, it would be nice to see a Bret Hart-Shawn Michaels match at three in the morning, but at least we have The Sunshine Network.

Hermie leaves the underground ... Speaking of The Sunshine Network and Major League Wrestling, former WWE broadcaster and producer Kevin Kelly has already left his job as host of MLW's *Underground TV*. Sources close to Kelly claim MLW couldn't afford the rate of pay he was requesting. Others inside MLW suggest that he didn't fit in with the wrestlers or crew. Nevertheless, officials have had a tough time finding a suitable replacement for Joey Styles, whose association with MLW had dated back to its inception.

They might have finally found their man: Eric Gargiulo. A former announcer with Ring of Honor and Combat Zone Wrestling, Gargiulo made his debut as MLW's play-by-play announcer in mid-January. The plan was for Gargiulo to call the action at ringside, rather than in post-production, as Styles had done in the past. While Styles left his position voluntarily, the addition of Gargiulo was viewed as another positive step in differentiating MLW from ECW, which many have regarded as the template for the Florida-based hardcore promotion.

Why not *American Idol*? The Rock's parody of "Heartbreak Hotel" is superb, and his voice might just be good enough to impress Simon Cowell, but "The Great One" has yet to try out for *American Idol*. Instead, The Rock was a guest on the first episode of *Idol* host Ryan Seacrest's new afternoon talk show, *On Air With Ryan Seacrest*, airing on Fox on January 12.

The Rock plugged his upcoming movie, *Walking Tall*, loosely based on the exploits of Tennessee sheriff Buford H. Pusser and a remake of the 1973 film starring Joe Don Baker. The accompanying clip depicted The Rock swinging a big stick, the trademark stick that he uses to intimidate enemies in the movie. No wonder The Rock told Seacrest that *Walking Tall* "kicks major ass."

In addition to discussing the aspirations he once had to be a pro football player, The Rock confirmed that Dunkin Donuts was his guiltiest pleasure. This prompted Seacrest to give him several boxes of Dunkin Donuts, which The Rock graciously shared with the audience. Unfortunately, he never got a chance to sing.

WWE Stockwatch

(For the period of December 1, 2003-January 15, 2004)

45-Day High: 14.15 on January 6 and 7
45-Day Low: 10.88 on December 4
52-Week High: 14.15 on January 6 and 7, 2004
52-Week Low: 7.43 on April 10, 2003

WWE stock reached its highest level since 9/11 as the U.S. continued its economic recovery. The value of the stock rose steadily throughout the entire 45-day period, suggesting that WWE's stock market comeback is for real. Shares had been routinely valued in the $14-to-$15 range just before the terrorist attacks, and had been valued in the $22-to-$24 range for much of the period between 1999, when WWE went public, and early-2001, when the economy took a noticeable downturn.

So, does this mean happy days are back at WWE headquarters? Not necessarily, but overall confidence in the economic outlook has prompted WWE to offer its superstars and employees more opportunities to purchase Class A shares as of late.

Meanwhile, WWE is cracking down on businesses that illegally use its programs, products, and intellectual property for their own profit. The Federal Court of Canada recently issued an injunction against 37 bars throughout Canada that air WWE pay-per-views without the company's permission. According to Carl DeMarco, president of WWE Canada, "WWE likes to be a good business partner, and we welcome the opportunity to work with bars or other commercial establishments in Canada to license our pay-per-views." A hearing to determine damages was to be held within a few weeks.

TV breakdown

Week beginning December 1

Raw (Spike TV): 3.6
Smackdown (UPN): 3.4
Velocity (Spike TV): 0.6
Confidential (Spike TV): 0.9
Sunday Night Heat (Spike TV): 1.0

Analysis: WWE Raw champion Bill Goldberg challenged either Triple-H or Kane to face him in the ring, but what he got was a six-man team match pitting him, Shawn Michaels, and Rob Van Dam against Randy Orton, Batista, and Kane. Goldberg's team scored the victory. WWE Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar defeated Chris Benoit in an excellent match on *Smackdown,* and Los Guerreros seemed headed for an ugly breakup. *Raw's* unpredictability and richer characters gave it the slight edge over *Smackdown* this week.

Week beginning December 8

Raw (Spike TV): 3.8
Smackdown (UPN): 3.6
Velocity (Spike TV): 0.7
Confidential (Spike TV): 0.8
Sunday Night Heat (Spike TV): 0.9

Analysis: The Rock provided one of the most memorable moments of the year when he made a surprise appearance on *Raw,* live from Anaheim, California, to help a beleaguered Mick Foley, who was being harassed by La Resistance. That segment earned a whopping 4.6. The surprise nature of The Rock's appearance is what it made it so powerful, but advanced billing might have helped *Raw* break the 4.0 barrier. On Thursday night, WWE Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar wrestled Rey Misterio Jr. in a big man vs. little man main event that was surprisingly exciting and competitive.

Week beginning December 15

Raw (Spike TV): 3.5
Smackdown (UPN): 3.4
Velocity (Spike TV): 0.6
Confidential (Spike TV): 0.4
Sunday Night Heat (Spike TV): 1.2

Analysis: It appears that the "pay-per-view effect," the phenomenon that usually saw *Raw's* numbers increase following a PPV held the previous night, is no more. *Raw's* rating was actually down this week, despite Evolution capturing all of the brand's titles at Armageddon. Smackdown GM Paul Heyman, borrowing Eric Bischoff's *"Raw* Roulette" idea, introduced the "bingo ball bin." Unfortunately, it resulted in Shannon Moore being picked as Brock Lesnar's opponent in a Smackdown title match. After Lesnar squashed Moore, we found out Heyman had Moore's name written on every ball in the bin.

Week beginning December 22

Raw (Spike TV): 3.0
Smackdown (UPN): 3.0
Velocity (Spike TV): 0.9
Confidential (Spike TV): 0.6
Sunday Night Heat (Spike TV): 1.1

Analysis: *Raw's* numbers fell considerably because it was a "Best Of 2003" show, designed to give wrestlers a break for the Christmas holidays. Still, it was a bit surprising that the rating dropped that dramatically, considering that the matches represented the best the Raw brand had to offer in 2003. *Smackdown* accomplished a tremendous logistical feat by airing a program from Baghdad, Iraq. Taped the previous Saturday, this Christmas night *Smackdown* exemplified the spirit of WWE at its best.

Week beginning December 29

Raw (Spike TV): 3.7
Smackdown (UPN): 2.8
Velocity (Spike TV): 0.9
Confidential (Spike TV): 0.8
Sunday Night Heat (Spike TV): 1.1

Analysis: WWE Raw champion Triple-H battled Shawn Michaels in a 30-minute PPV-quality match, but the program's overall rating of 3.7 was disappointing, considering it was a Raw title match advertised a week in advance. Kurt Angle gave an emotional speech on the New Year's broadcast of *Smackdown,* saluting the Coalition forces in Iraq, and Rey Misterio Jr. defeated Tajiri for the cruiserweight title. *Confidential* rebounded from an embarrassing 0.4 only two weeks earlier to a more respectable 0.8 this week.

Week beginning January 5

Raw (Spike TV): 3.5
Smackdown (UPN): 3.6
Velocity (Spike TV): 0.9
Confidential (Spike TV): 0.8
Sunday Night Heat (Spike TV): 1.1

Analysis: Jerry Lawler enjoys the spotlight when *Raw* travels to Memphis, though he didn't appreciate the RKO Randy Orton gave him in his hometown on this night. But Chris Jericho catching Mae Young in a shower was genuine shock TV. On *Smackdown,* Hardcore Holly beat U.S. champ The Big Show in a non-title streetfight en route to his title match with Brock Lesnar at the Royal Rumble. Why is Lesnar-Holly so eerily reminiscent of then-WWF champ Big Show vs. Big Bossman at Armageddon 1999? Did Holly have a prayer?

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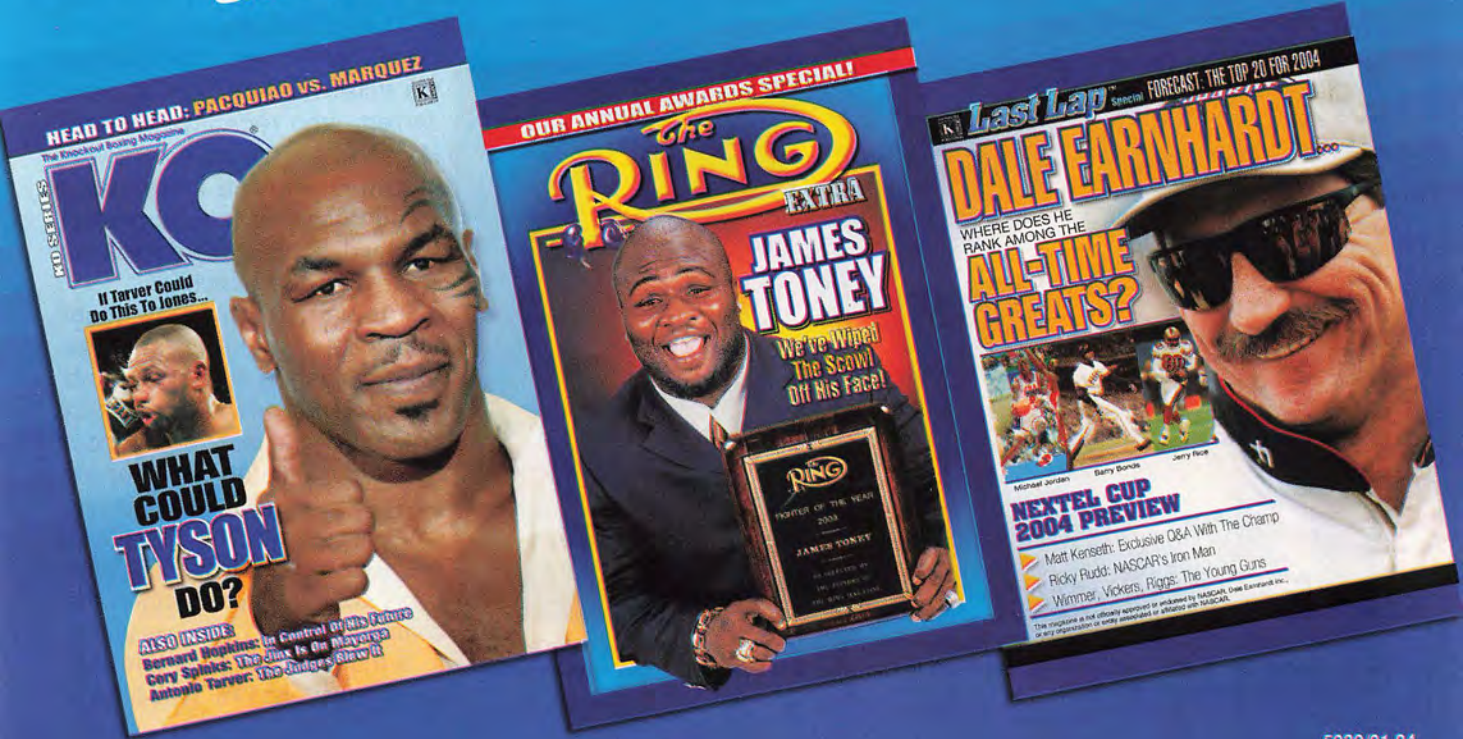
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the steel cage

By Liz Hunter

GOLDBERG HITS AN ICEBERG. WWE Raw champion Triple-H defended his title against Shawn Michaels at the 2004 Royal Rumble. After a three-month title reign, and losing to Triple-H at Armageddon, Bill Goldberg was pushed out of the title picture. So, nearly a year of false starts, creative missteps, and half-hearted attempts has led to the unalterable verdict: Goldberg's run in WWE has been a failure.

Other than have Goldberg don Goldust's blonde wig, Creative did absolutely nothing to add depth to Goldberg's character, create much original drama in his feud with Evolution, or allow him to gain a lot of momentum before challenging Triple-H for the belt. Incredibly, it seems that Hardcore Holly has been given more of a push in his current run against Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar.

I haven't seen such a half-hearted attempt at promoting a wrestler since Scott Steiner—or Rob Van Dam, or Chris Benoit, or Lance Storm—entered WWE. I'm now convinced that WWE has a bias against wrestlers who have gained fame in other promotions. Steiner went from WCW World champion to being Test's manservant. Rob Van Dam went from an ECW phenomenon to someone who didn't even make last year's WrestleMania. And it's hard to believe that Benoit was a WCW World champion, or that Storm wore the WCW U.S., cruiserweight, and hardcore belts simultaneously.

We were duped into thinking Triple-H would be a steppingstone for Goldberg. Instead, Triple-H proved that Goldberg was merely a pawn used to strengthen Evolution, just as Ric Flair had used Ronnie Garvin to strengthen The Four Horsemen in 1987. By teasing a changing of the guard, both Helmsley and Flair—along with Evolution and the Horsemen, respectively—emerged more powerful by ultimately surviving the challenge.

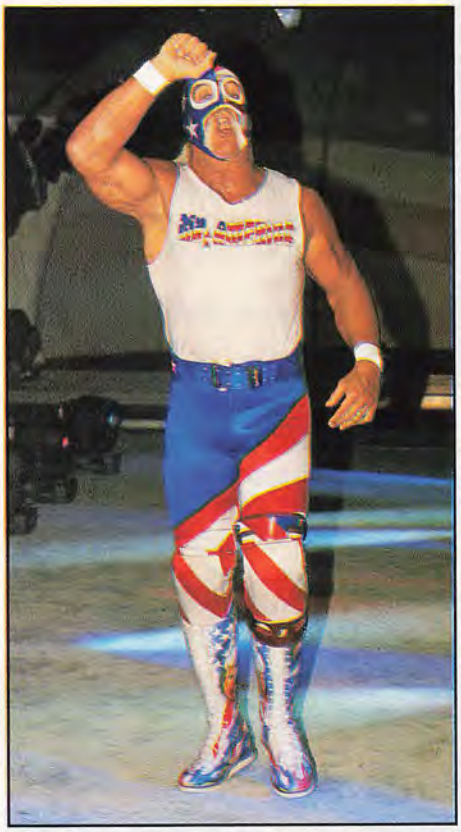
Yes, it seems to me that you can call Goldberg a modern-day Ronnie Garvin. I hope the rumor is true and he gets a chance to redeem himself with a match against Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar at WrestleMania XX, but I have a good idea of how that would turn out, too.

BOUND FOR DISASTER? The much-hyped debut of Hulk Hogan in NWA-TNA might not ever take place. Apparently, TNA is still hopeful that Hogan will appear, but it is no longer even bringing up his name on its Wednesday night pay-per-views. And Jimmy Hart has stopped making appearances as well. TNA's first three-hour, Sunday night pay-per-view, titled Bound For Glory, was originally scheduled for November 30, 2003, but a reaggravation of Hogan's nagging knee injury sent TNA officials into full damage control, pleading with cable operators to have patience.

As a result, the big event was tentatively rescheduled for February 2004. TNA officials, including minority owner Jeff Jarrett, stressed that the date was not definite. Jerry Jarrett, who recently met with Hogan at his Tampa estate, was informed that the knee injury could postpone his debut until May or June. But it hardly sounds like more than a possibility.

The Jarretts obviously doubt that they can pull off such an event without a star of Hogan's caliber. Meanwhile, Panda Energy is reportedly losing thousands of dollars on every weekly pay-per-view. TNA needs a pivotal event—either the arrival of a megastar or a strong national cable contract—to transform the company from a risky investment to a moneymaking venture. My question is this: Will TNA have a

Goldberg couldn't overcome Kane (or Triple-H) in the final title defense of his first reign as WWE Raw champ. Liz Hunter wouldn't be surprised if that was "Da Man's" last big match during a very underwhelming run in WWE.



Hulk Hogan was supposed to headline NWA-TNA's first three-hour PPV in November, then it was tentatively rescheduled for February, and now we're hearing May or June (maybe). How long can TNA wait for the "Hulkster"?

leg to stand on by the time Hogan's knee heals?

KISS ME, JOE! "Pro athletes are always going to be the objects of teenage girls' affections. When I was 14, I remember going crazy over Joe Namath, the New York Jets quarterback. In fact, I once even passed up a wrestling card at Madison Square Garden to watch the Jets on *Monday Night Football.*"

That was the lead for my "On Assignment" column that appeared in the October 1984 issue of *PWI.* I provide that excerpt as proof of my long-held admiration for Joe Namath, despite his controversial comments to ESPN reporter Suzy Kolber during a game between the Jets and the New England Patriots on December 20.

While on the sidelines, Kolber tried to ask Namath for his opinion of the Jets' struggles. A drunken Namath smiled, looked at Kolber leeringly, and replied, "I want to kiss you." He muttered something about current quarterback Chad Pennington helping the Jets bounce back next season if he's able to play all year. Then he ended the interview with another "I want to kiss you."

I know exactly how Kolber felt. She was on the field representing ESPN and, then, all of a sudden, she was treated like a cheap sex object. I'd love to talk with Suzy, who happens to be a native of Ambler, Pennsylvania, the home of London Publishing. Fortunately, "Broadway" Joe managed to reach her a couple of days after the embarrassing incident. "She was a real pro," Namath told *USA Today.* "She handled it so well. I appreciate Suzy's professionalism ... I can say it will never happen again."

I'm glad the Namath-Kolber incident received so much publicity. That indicates society no longer regards that as acceptable behavior. During my first decade as a wrestling journalist, that was practically an everyday occurrence.

Now, if I could only get Nikolai Volkoff to apologize for calling me a "babbling babushka," perhaps we could take care of another injustice. □

strange list of the month

FIVE WOMEN WHO CAN EMPATHIZE WITH SUZY KOLBER

1. Lilian Garcia
2. Terri
3. Goldylocks
4. Brandi Mankiewicz
5. Liz Hunter

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win, lose, or draw

By Harry Burkett

BROCK LESNAR. BATISTA. Randy Orton. John Cena. What thoughts come to mind? Big muscles. Big tattoos. Big-time talent. Each of these youngsters can do it all.

Brock Lesnar angered Billy Kidman by using his finishing move, the shooting star press, en route to winning the WWE Smackdown title at WrestleMania XIX. Randy Orton, the self-proclaimed "Legend Killer," traded his wheelbarrow suplex for the RKO, but whether he's wrestling like his old man, Bob Jr., or borrowing a move from Steve Austin, this is one of the most versatile wrestlers on the Raw roster.

Likewise, Batista executes suplexes and hiptosses as easily as he delivers power bombs and spears. John Cena, although Lesnar possesses about 30 more pounds of muscle mass, added the FU—an irreverent version of the Smackdown champion's F5—to his arsenal. Whether he's battling a rugged veteran like The Undertaker, an Olympic gold medalist like Kurt Angle, or a cruiserweight like Rey Misterio Jr., Cena has the physique, endurance, and diverse array of skills to adapt to any style.

It's no coincidence that Rick Bassman, the promoter of California's Ultimate Pro Wrestling, originally trained Cena. In fact, Cena, Batista, Orton, and Lesnar all appear as if they walked out of Bassman's 1980s quartet, Powerteam U.S.A. Of course, Sting and The Ultimate Warrior (then known as Flash and Rock) were original members of that group. Like Sting and the Warrior, Cena, Batista, Orton, and Lesnar have the physiques of bodybuilders, but without the unnecessary bulk that would inhibit ring performance.

Bassman was ahead of his time. Twenty years ago, he envisioned the prototype of the ultimate professional wrestler. Truck-driving physiques and meat-and-potatoes toughness were going out of style. He realized wrestling was becoming more like stunt work and that athleticism would be more important than ever. Wrestlers would have to not only look good, but also be capable of taking in-ring action to a higher level. Bassman wasn't the only businessman who realized where wrestling was going. Eddie Sharkey had already cranked out The Road Warriors and Nikita Koloff in Minnesota, and Vince McMahon had already turned Hulk Hogan into a national superhero.

It has taken a generation for wrestling to evolve into the vision originally held by McMahon, Sharkey, and Bassman. Yes, it is true that none of these visionaries expected lighter wrestlers to become so important in the industry—in WWE's cruiserweight division, NWA-TNA's X division, and Ring of Honor. However, the size gap between talented cruiserweights and heavyweight supermen has never been greater. Do any of WWE's cruiserweights have much of a chance of winning the Smackdown title? Not really.

Let's consider WWE's four prototypes—Lesnar, Orton, Batista, and Cena—a bit more carefully. They come from different backgrounds. Lesnar was a wrestling All-American at the University of Minnesota and the 2000 NCAA heavyweight champion. Orton is a third-generation star who was immersed in the sport at an early age, and now benefits from the expertise of both his father, "Cowboy"

If you think Batista and John Cena employ the same basic style in the ring, that's probably because they went through the same type of training in OVW. They even feuded there. Harry Burkett doesn't think it's a good thing that WWE is creating so many stars out of the same basic mold.

Bob Orton Jr., and his father's father, "The Big O" Bob Orton Sr. Batista is a bodybuilder and all-around fitness freak, and has suffered more injuries while jogging than while wrestling. And there's Cena, whom Bassman labeled The Prototype at his training school, Ultimate University.

What made these superstars so versatile—and, in that sense, very similar—in the ring? What these men have in common is rigorous training and experience in Ohio Valley, the home of WWE's developmental program. While Lesnar stuck to tag team action, most notably as part of The Minnesota Stretching Crew with Shelton Benjamin and later Brian Keck, those other three guys—Orton, Batista, and Cena—had numerous run-ins with each other. Orton lost to Batista (then known as Leviathan) in his final Ohio Valley match before leaving for WWE, and Cena (then known as Prototype) once used an ether-soaked rag to beat Batista for the OVW heavyweight title.

In addition to their in-ring training, all of these stars honed their verbal skills under Jim Cornette and Danny Davis in Ohio Valley. Brock Lesnar impressed most fans by stringing sentences together flawlessly after splitting with Paul Heyman in WWE. Randy Orton spent a lifetime watching promos given by Bobs Sr. and Jr. Batista's intensity and articulateness surprised everyone during recent exchanges with Steve Austin and Shawn Michaels on *Raw*. Cena was exposed to Hollywood while training for his wrestling career in California, and was even briefly featured on a reality series called *Manhunt*. His raps don't just fall out of the sky; they're the result of natural ability and refined talent.

The Lex Luger pun notwithstanding, Vince McMahon likes things that come in total packages—and Lesnar, Orton, Batista, and Cena certainly fit that description. They're well-versed in high-impact power moves, catch-as-catch-can wrestling, and even talking trash. What else could fans want? Is it possible for wrestlers to be *too* perfect?

That's Rico getting trapped in a corner by Randy Orton during a 2001 OVW match. Like fellow OVW alumni Batista, Cena, and Brock Lesnar, Orton is expected to be a big part of WWE's future. Their matches against each other, Burkett believes, could be too perfect.

I think it's entirely possible. Too many fans are paying attention to everything *but* the actual wrestling. Who can blame them? What's the difference between a Stone-Cold stunner and an RKO, an unprettier and an Edge-a-cution, and a senton and a swanton? Today's wrestling maneuvers are either too similar or too complex, and there are far too many personalized names for them. If all properly trained wrestlers are supposed to be capable of executing any of these moves, does it even make sense to have a traditional tale of the tape to compare these guys?

Wrestling used to be simpler. When AWA junior heavyweight champ Buck Zumhofe would jump into the ring with the 474-pound Crusher Blackwell, announcer Ken Resnick would say something like, "He's not gonna pick up that big guy." Every fan could understand the dynamics at work. Zumhofe had his strengths and weaknesses, as did Blackwell, and nothing was wrong with that. Everyone knew that Nick Bockwinkel couldn't take a punch, Ric Flair couldn't do a flying bodypress, and Bob Backlund couldn't talk his way out of a wet paper bag. In many ways, though, wrestlers' weaknesses were as compelling as their strengths.

So, what are we supposed to think when Chris Benoit and Eddie Guerrero go through a sequence of suplexes, both hit the mat, both do kip-ups, and they end up staring at each other? What are we supposed to think when it takes four Angle slams to three F5s to win a match? Why does every bout have to be a neck-and-neck contest or a stalemate? Too often, timing and gymnastics are deemed more important than match strategy. Just once, I'd like a wrestler to destroy his opponent in a one-sided massacre on pay-per-view. It still happens in boxing, doesn't it?

As Larry Zbyszko used to say, wrestling is a game of human chess. But it's not very interesting if everyone makes the right moves. Prototypes? I'd rather have wrestlers. □

the straight shooter

By Dan Murphy

"MURPHY, YOU'RE actually home."

"Yeah," I said slowly, trying to focus my eyes on the VCR clock on the other side of the living room. It was about 10:30 a.m. and I was taking advantage of a day off with every intention of sleeping until noon. It took me a while to figure out who was on the other end of the phone line.

"You're a hard man to track down," the voice said. "Why don't you ever plug in that old answering machine? I've been calling for days."

I rubbed the sleep muck out of my eyes as recognition slowly dawned upon me.

"Mikey?" I asked. "Where are you?"

"In the parking lot of your apartment complex," he answered. "Shower up and get some clothes on. We're going to lunch."

I became friends with Mike Strasser during high school, when we both ran track and cross-country. He had a curious nature and an obsessive personality and we got each other interested in our favorite bands and movies. During college, I turned him into a wrestling fan, which wasn't too difficult, since the NWO was the hottest commodity on TV at the time. We DJ'd a bizarre college radio show on which the play list could include anything from Wean to Cream, The Pixies to The Carpenters, and The Tragically Hip to Prong.

After college, we rented an apartment together. He was the neat and clean Felix Unger; I was the slovenly Oscar Madison. Gradually, we both became slobs.

You couldn't have found a cooler bachelor pad. At any hour of any day, you could expect The Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour, Reservoir Dogs,* or *Apocalypse Now* to be playing on TV. Beer was plentiful—in fact, it was the only thing ever in the fridge. Pizza when we had cash, Ramen noodles when we didn't. There was a blues bar on the corner, and on summer nights, we'd sit on the porch and listen to the bands. Mikey took up smoking—something he blamed me for whenever his parents stopped in unexpectedly and got a whiff of the nicotine in the air.

We had no money, and every few months, we'd have either the hot water or the phones turned off. After just about a year, Mikey moved back in with his parents. Money was tight and, besides, he felt bad about sticking his dad with mowing the lawn and shoveling the driveway.

Mikey took some jobs bartending and came just a few credits short of getting his bachelor's degree. Finally, he decided to join the Army, a move I just couldn't understand. Of all things, the enigma that was Mikey decided to study Arabic and become a linguist. With his Germanic blond hair and blue eyes, he was about as far from Arabic as a man could get. Maybe the fact that he was to be shipped to California had something to do with his decision. He joked that he needed military intervention to get his life in order after spending 11 months living in poverty with me.

In any case, he went off and joined the Army. Every once in a while, he'd e-mail me about the sun and surf in California. He couldn't get over finding copies of *PWI* on the West Coast and seeing my stuff in there. Although I could never understand his motivations, I was always proud of Mikey.

Then came September 11, 2001, and Arabic translators were suddenly in demand. A short time later, Mikey was shipped to Kuwait. He sent me a

Photo by Lisa M. Zunzanyika/U.S. Air Force via Getty Images

Kurt Angle poses with (from left to right), NASCAR driver Mike Wallace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Richard Myers, model Leeann Tweeden, and actor Robin Williams during a USO tour of Iraq that began before the rest of WWE's Smackdown crew arrived for a TV taping that was a huge hit with our Armed Forces.

typically cryptic note when he was shipped out. It read, "Dan, as you may have guessed, I'm far from home. Everything else is classified. I'll talk to you soon."

Understated and infuriatingly mysterious. Vintage Mikey. We wrote each other fairly regularly while he was stationed in Basrah. On his request, I bought and sent him the *WWE Divas Undressed* DVD and some other wrestling tapes. But now here he was—a week before Thanksgiving 2003—calling me from the parking lot behind my apartment.

Torrie Wilson and her fellow WWE divas are, to no one's surprise, very popular with the male members of our Armed Forces stationed in Iraq. So are wrestling in general and *PWI*, as Dan Murphy found out from someone who knows.

He was home for two weeks on leave and had just loaded up on DVDs, including the Ric Flair career retrospective that you'll see reviewed in "Before The Bell" this month. We went for a drive and stopped for lunch.

"The guys in my unit are impressed that I know someone who writes for *PWI,"* he told me. I told him I was far more impressed that even one of the brave men and women defending our country knows who the heck I am.

"Every few weeks, we're allowed to drive into Kuwait and buy supplies," Mikey said. "We load up on *PWI* and *Maxim.* That's our link to back home."

It floored me to think that *PWI* was available on newsstands in Kuwait. It turns out that wrestling is pretty popular with our Armed Forces.

Mikey told me his unit took in two stray dogs over the spring. The dogs were named Tuba and Basrah, but Mikey saw how the dogs would wrestle over a tennis ball and renamed them Junkyard Dog and The Heartbreak Puppy. Mikey's team began to call the "matches" between the two, although Mikey assured me both dogs always played nice. The antics of the grappling dogs were a favorite of the 402D Civil Affairs Battalion out of Buffalo, New York.

Divas Undressed was a favorite among the males in the team. When they weren't watching matches or Torrie Wilson cavorting on a beach, they were playing wrestling games on Playstation. Wrestling was also a major topic of conversation around the camp.

Of course, things aren't always fun and games. Mikey had been very close to gunfire, even though he was a linguist. When dealing with insurrectionists, you never know where the gunfire or explosions could come from. He didn't want to talk much about war stories. He told me a few humorous—and a few very serious—anecdotes and we went back to talking about wrestling and telling stories about the girls from high school.

I was thinking of Mikey when WWE aired its special Christmas edition of *Smackdown* from Iraq. Sure, WWE got some great public relations out of sending a crew to perform in front of the Armed Forces, but to me, it seemed more than a simple marketing move. WWE didn't have to take time during the holiday season to send some of its top stars—and the chairman of the company—into a war zone. But it did, and I think it was appreciated by the not only the 5,000 troops who were able to attend, but to soldiers serving everywhere.

WWE takes a lot of flak from the media, including the wrestling media. But in this case, the company delivered something truly special. Sure, it was just a little wrestling show, and in the end, that might not amount to much. But when Steve Austin dropped Vince McMahon with his Santa-Cold stunner, it was entertainment our troops relished. It's those silly little diversions from home that make all the difference and help keep our soldiers' morales up.

Mikey's tour of duty should be just about over when this magazine hits the newsstands. I hope he'll be able to pick up a copy of this *PWI* from the drugstore down the street from Cardinal O'Hara High School. In the meantime, I'll continue to pray for God to watch over Sgt. Strasser and his team. I thank WWE and the wrestlers who traveled to Iraq for a truly classy gesture.

And to any American soldiers reading this magazine, I say this: God bless you, and come home soon. □

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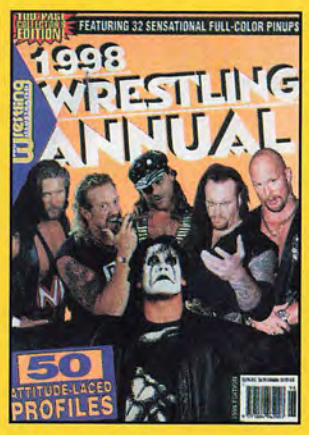

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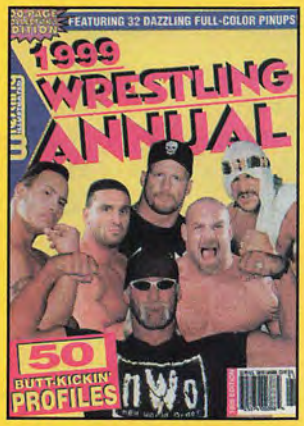

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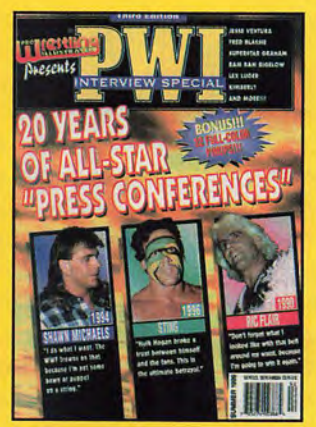

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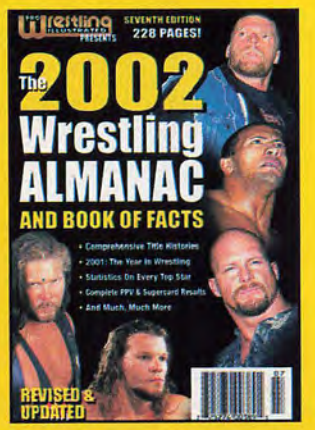

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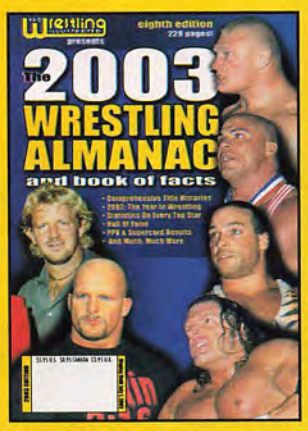

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THE Wrestling ANALYST

MARK HENRY

Years Pro: 7
Size: 6'2", 372
"PWI 500" Listings: 2003—244
2002—122
2001—167
2000—205
1999—116
1998—191
Titles: WWF European
***PWI* Awards:** Rookie of the Year:
3rd runner-up (1998)

[[the numbers]]

Offense (8.0): Although Mark Henry mastered a few scientific moves and fine-tuned some high-impact maneuvers during his extensive training in Ohio Valley Wrestling, WWE Creative has saddled him with the "World's Strongest Man" gimmick yet again. That discourages Henry from moving beyond a stereotypical (and *very* basic) power offense.

Defense (8.0): If Henry isn't able to plow forward inside the ring, he generally just stands there until his foe—after several attempts—finally chops him down. Watching tapes of Ernie Ladd and Bad News Brown has no doubt inspired Henry's toughness, but he's forgetting a key attribute of heels like Ladd and Brown: They knew it was important to high- tail it when necessary.

Experience (8.0): It might actually be best for Henry to get out of the WWE environment for a while, and that includes Ohio Valley. We know it's not likely to happen, but some time in NWA-TNA, on the U.S. indy circuit, or in Japan would give Henry new freedom to experiment. Besides, he would be treated like a genuine superstar, not a failed wrestler in need of constant retraining and retooling. That cannot help his self-esteem.

Conditioning (8.5): Henry returned to OVW in 2000 and adopted a rigorous weight loss regimen. He lost nearly 100 pounds, grew out his hair, and began sporting new ring attire. In 2001, a reinvigorated Henry became an impact player as a member of Bolin Services. Even now, though, his weight fluctuates wildly between 340 and 390 pounds.

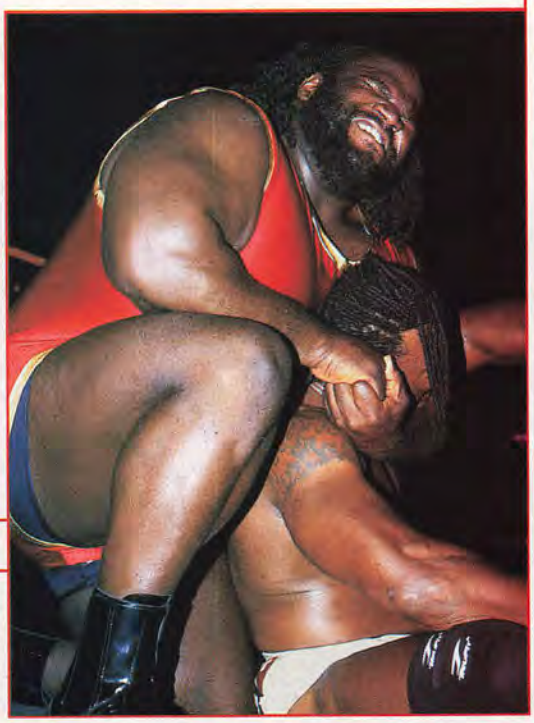
Science (7.5): Consider the esteemed grapplers to emerge from Stu Hart's Dungeon: Bret Hart, Owen Hart, Chris Benoit, Chris Jericho, Lance Storm, and *Mark Henry?!* Believe it or not, Henry trained with the famous Hart family in preparation for his WWE career. Henry didn't get much out of those lessons, but neither did Superstar Graham nor Junkyard Dog.

Stamina (8.5): For a 400-pounder, Henry exhibited impressive endurance in his battles against older foes such as Jerry Lawler and Vader in the mid-1990s, and also showed admirable agility against opponents such as Orlando Jordan, Mark Magnus, and Booker T in 2002 and 2003. Yet he must lose more weight to remain consistent on the Raw roster and to move up in the rankings.

Power (10.0): He probably deserves an even higher score, but we'll stick to our scale. Henry, who represented the U.S. as a super heavyweight weightlifter in the 1996 Olympics, can still legitimately claim to be the strongest man in the world. As recently as 2002, Henry won a $75,000 Humvee in Arnold Schwarzenegger's World's Strongest Man competition. He might be as strong as ever.

Speed (6.5): The brawling strongman is nearly extinct in WWE. Henry probably could have kept pace with Bruno Sammartino, Superstar Graham, Hulk Hogan, Big John Studd, and even El Gigante in their respective heydays, but in 2004, Henry is a step behind Triple-H, Brock Lesnar, and Batista, all of whom possess strength *and* agility.

Ability To Absorb Punishment (9.5): Henry is not a quitter. He has suffered many injuries and endured the criticism of his peers. His massive trunk absorbs most body-blows, and his tremendous thigh and calf strength enables him to kick out of leg holds. This native Texan is no more likely to tap out in the ring than he is to give up his career.



① **One of the good things about Mark Henry is that he always puts all of his considerable strength into even basic holds and moves like the rear chinlock. One of the bad things about him is that for the most part, he still only uses basic holds and moves.**

[[the analysis]]

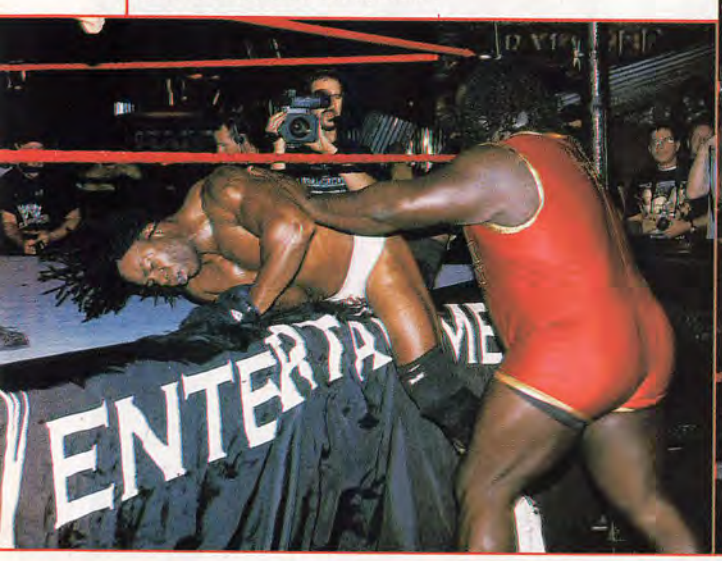
Repertoire: WWE executive Tom Prichard, with some help from Dory Funk Jr., supervised some of Henry's most intense training sessions in 1998 and '99. But those workouts were designed to improve Henry's timing and pacing more than anything else. The powerslam remains his most potent weapon, and often sets up a devastating vertical splash finisher. Since returning to WWE, Henry has been very effective with the bearhug and full-nelson.

Strengths: Henry's main strengths are his humanity and sense of purpose. His friends describe him as a gentle giant. Few fans will ever forget the tears streaking down Henry's face as he read a beautiful poem to pay tribute to Owen Hart the night following Owen's death in 1999. Dedication and willpower made Henry one of the world's greatest weightlifters and now sustain him during his challenging WWE career. He's a solid human being.

Weaknesses: The big man has suffered numerous physical setbacks since turning pro. Henry defeated Jerry Lawler in his 1996 debut, but soon afterward, he was sidelined with a broken leg for more than a year. He missed a few months in 1998-'99 with a knee injury. He hurt his ankle in 2002 and spent several more months rehabbing that and other injuries. Henry must streamline his weightlifting physique to remain durable in pro wrestling.

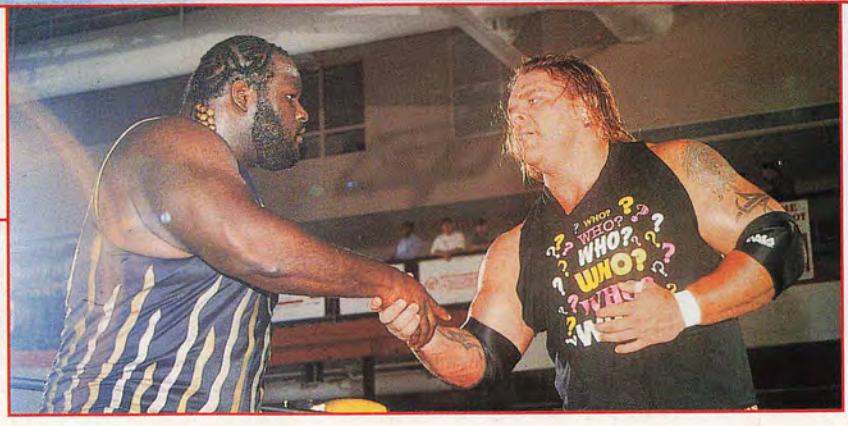
Defining Career Moment: If his career ended today, Henry would be best remembered for sharing a bed with Mae Young. Forget about Henry bending frying pans. Forget about his matches, because he has never strung together enough big wins to gain any real momentum. Whether he was impersonating Barry White for dear ol' Mae, or wooing Chyna with poetry, Henry displayed the most potential as "Sexual Chocolate."

Future: Vince McMahon has been very patient with Henry's career progress and is making an honest attempt to make him a superstar. But the WWE chairman has good reason: He signed the Olympian to a 10-year deal that doesn't expire until 2006. That gives Henry two more years to prove his worth to the company. Apparently, McMahon and Jim Ross believe in Henry and want to give him every opportunity for success. Well, that, and McMahon is determined to get a decent return on his investment.



② **It took him a number of years to develop it, but Henry now has a strong killer instinct. He doesn't think twice about jumping on a foe like Booker T (literally) when he's in a vulnerable position. And he won't allow a weakened opponent to catch a breather, either.**

③ Henry's defensive skills need work, quite frankly. If an opponent spots an opening and can turn the momentum of the match in his favor, Henry too often is at a loss for what to do to slow the man down.



④ Give the former "Sexual Chocolate" major points for determination and perseverance. He really wants to be a star. When he comes this close to a big win and then doesn't get it, he gets angry. And he has made some good strides since his days as a mid-carder who was too nice and too much of a comedy figure for his own good.

BRET HART vs. DAVEY BOY SMITH

DATA SHEET

Title At Stake	WWF Intercontinental
Referee	Joey Marella
Date	August 29, 1992
Event	SummerSlam 1992
Site	Wembley Stadium, London, England

SYNOPSIS

The family feud between the "Hitman" and the "British Bulldog" gave us one of the greatest Intercontinental title matches in history.

Hart and Smith had feuded throughout the 1980s as parts of The Hart Foundation and The British Bulldogs, respectively. The fact that they were brothers-in-law (Bret's partner, Jim Neidhart, was also his brother-in-law) had never been publicly acknowledged by the WWF.

After the dissolution of The British Bulldogs (Smith and Dynamite Kid), Smith competed in Calgary and elsewhere before returning to the WWF. In the meantime, Hart had captured the Intercontinental title and established himself as one of the federation's rising singles stars.

Smith went on a winning streak upon his WWF return, and soon his relationship with Hart was revealed. As Smith continued his winning ways, his wife—Bret's sister Diana—declared that Smith deserved a shot at the Intercontinental title. Smith wanted a friendly match, but Bret was reluctant to let a championship belt divide the Hart family.

Despite the "Hitman's" protests, the match was signed for SummerSlam 1992, to take place in Smith's homeland of Great Britain. In the weeks prior to the match, the Hart family took sides, with some claiming Smith was stirring up trouble by challenging Hart, and others feeling Bret was ducking Davey Boy's challenge.

A crowd of 80,355 packed Wembley Stadium to see the long-awaited bout between "The Excellence Of Execution" and the Bulldog. Smith was accompanied to the ring by boxer Lennox Lewis, who waved the Union Jack, clearly establishing Smith as the home-

Even though Davey Boy Smith and reigning Intercontinental champ Bret Hart were both fan favorites at the time, there was no doubt who the crowd's choice at Wembley Stadium was. Everyone loved the Bulldog!

Hart displayed his typical technical excellence throughout, catching his brother-in-law with a terrific dropkick at one point (top), but he underestimated the technical skills of Smith, who countered him beautifully to get the pin (below).

Although it wasn't really a key move in the match, Bret did manage to, appropriately, bulldog the Bulldog.

town favorite. Diana and the rest of the family took their places at ringside for a family feud on the grandest of stages.

The "scientific match" started as anything but. Tempers flared early and the two exchanged shoves and went to the outside. Hart settled down the match and established the upper hand with a side headlock. Smith—seen by most fans as a pure power wrestler—surprised Hart by reversing the headlock into an armbar, demonstrating his own formidable technical skills. Frustrated, Hart came off the ropes, only to get caught with another armbar, followed by a crucifix for a two-count.

Smith continued to work on Hart's arm with a hammerlock until Hart broke loose with a knee to the midsection. Displaying a newfound aggression, Hart hammered Smith to the mat, and then taunted ringside fans. Intent on displaying his technical mastery over his brother-in-law, Hart went to work on Smith's oft-injured back, hooking the Bulldog in a chinlock and applying pressure on his vertebrae. As Smith battled back, Hart leveled him with elbows and kicks before nailing Smith with, oddly enough, a vicious bulldog.

Hart scampered to the top rope, but Smith caught him with a powerslam. Smith was unable to follow up, however, missing a big splash. Hart took the battle to the floor, slamming Smith's head into the cornerpost. With Smith weakened, Hart took over with forearms and dropkicks, and then went back to working Smith's back with a chinlock. The crowd tried to rally their hero, as it seemed like the match was in Hart's hands. Hart hit a snap suplex, but Smith showed impressive ring awareness by scoring a surprise two-count off a backslide.

Smith's near-fall frustrated Hart, and the "Hitman" responded with an elbowdrop off the second rope, usually a setup for his sharpshooter. But rather than go for his finisher, Hart applied a sleeper. Once Smith powered out, he dropped Hart with a series of clotheslines. With his countrymen cheering him on, Smith nailed a gorilla press-slam and a suplex for a pair of two-counts. Smith finally hoisted Hart onto his shoulder and connected with his finisher, the running powerslam. But Hart kicked out at two.

A backslide from Smith seemed to catch the "Hitman" off-guard and got him a two-count that was perilously close to turning into a three-count.

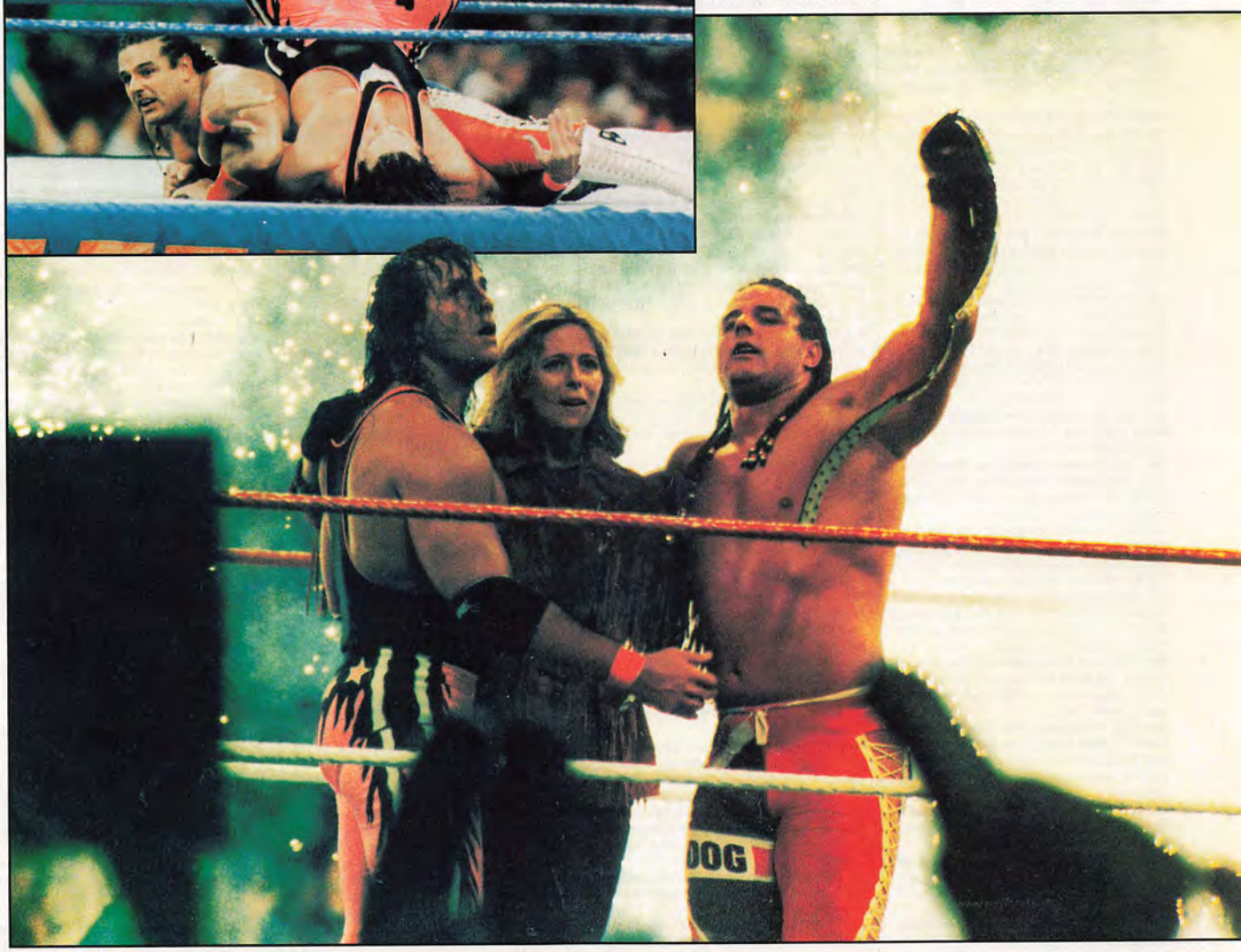
The Bulldog had relied on the powerslam throughout his singles career and seemed to be at a loss once Hart kicked out. He rolled Hart to the outside and brought him back into the ring with a bone-jarring suplex. Hart recovered with a German suplex of his own, but Smith upped the ante, nearly driving Hart through the mat with a superplex for a two-count. In desperation, both

men connected with clotheslines, knocking each other to the mat.

With the crowd screaming and the Hart family riveted at ringside, Bret slowly made his way over to the Bulldog and locked him in the sharpshooter. The situation looked grim for Smith, who had rarely wrestled a singles match lasting longer than 20 minutes. Slowly, he began crawling for the ropes, finally forcing a break. Hart pulled Smith to his feet and went to Irish whip him off the ropes, but Smith reversed him, sending Hart off the ropes. Smith ducked, looking to back bodydrop the "Hitman," but Hart countered with a sunset flip. But as Hart reached his legs up to pull Smith down by the shoulders, Smith collapsed to his knees, pinning Hart beneath him in a cradle. Smith held Hart's shoulders to the mat just long enough to claim the Intercontinental title.

Following the match, Hart sulked momentarily as Diana and other members of the Hart family filled the ring. Finally, Hart faced his brother-in-law and shook his hand, acknowledging that on this one night, Smith was the better man.

This would be the biggest match of Smith's career, as well as one of Hart's all-time favorites. Less than two months later, Smith would lose the I-C title to Shawn Michaels, while Hart would go on to win his first WWF World championship from Ric Flair. And this classic would be voted 1992's Match of the Year by *PWI* readers. □



Although a crucifix didn't earn Davey Boy the I-C title (left), in the end, he didn't disappoint the more than 80,000 fans that turned out for SummerSlam 1992. And Bret, his sister (who was also Smith's wife) Diana, and the Bulldog made their peace (below).

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Bagwell & Scorpio, Jim Cornette, Jerry Lawler, Hansen & T. Funk-Abdullah & Sullivan.

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Indicate substitute choice: _____

6389/01-04

You're at the airport. You see your favorite wrestler relaxing in one of the terminals. You rush up to him or her as questions fill your excited mind. There are certain things you just *have* to know about this person. Well, these are the 12 questions you'd never think of asking

12 questions

COLT CABANA

What is the one food you refuse to eat?

I hate tuna because every wrestler always eats it and it tastes like crap. Oh, and I'm allergic to kiwi.

What makes "Copacabana" such a great entrance song?

Barry Manilow is one of the greatest, if not *the greatest* singer of my father's generation, and it's not hard rock like every other independent wrestler's entrance music.

As a sensitive, intelligent man, what do you think women can do to be taken more seriously in wrestling?

They should cook prematch meals for all male wrestlers. And they should wash my gear out manually on washboards before I wrestle.

If it weren't for Ring of Honor, what would you be doing right now?

I think I would be entering Chutes and Ladders contests across the nation while selling homemade ring toss sets on the side for extra cash.

What was the longest road trip you ever made, and how long did it take you to complete it?

I did Chicago to Philadelphia to Milwaukee. We left late on a Thursday night for the Philly show on Friday, and then we had to be in Milwaukee for a 2 p.m. show. That's about 29 hours of travel in 36 hours.

What was the worst payday you ever made on an indy show?

I got nothing and then I stole four beers from behind the bar. Since I don't drink, I gave them to a buddy of mine who was there with me.

You have a choice between Bill Clinton, Paris Hilton, and Jim Hellwig to live with on a deserted island for the rest of your life. Which would you choose and why?

I'd have to go with Hellwig. A) He'd probably teach me the way of The Warrior, 2) We'd have fun finding random stuff on the beach to paint my face with, and D) We'd shake the palm trees so hard in Ultimate Warrior ring rope fashion that we'd make enough commotion to get saved from the island.

What's the one place in which you'd love to live?

I'd love to live in Australia because the chicks are hot and I could learn how to surf.

What's the first thing you notice about a woman?

Her personality—her glowing, beautiful, big-chested personality.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I'd like to say that Howie Mandel was one of the most underrated comedians of all-time. He did the voices for the little gremlins, and for that I salute him.

A few months ago, on the "hammer/midget/roulette wheel" question, C.M. Punk wanted to blame the midget for your death. Now, could you really blame the midget for killing you?

Yes, I could. Well, maybe I couldn't. C.M. Punk is a very powerful guy in the industry, and if he warrants my death, then the midget is just out for a payday. I just hope it wasn't the midget I lost to in a match once.

You have a hammer, midget, and a roulette wheel. What are your plans for the evening?

I put the midget on the wheel and spin him around until he was dizzy. Then I'd hand him the hammer and get him to build me an ark. I'd commission it Cabana's Ark. □

fantastic finishers

Shooting Star Press

You might also hear it being called: reverse moonsault press, seven-year itch, wild thing, AV star press

Where you might have seen it: Few men have made the shooting star press their finisher, but the short list includes Jushin Liger, Billy Kidman, The Amazing Red, Marc Mero, Magnum Tokyo, Jodie Fleisch, and Paul London. In 1990, Liger used the daredevil move to capture the IWGP junior heavyweight title twice—first from Naoki Sano, and then again from Chris "Pegasus Kid" Benoit. Kidman, a seven-time WCW/WWE cruiserweight champ, has used the move since his days as an independent wrestler called Kid Flash. London made quite an impression during his short time with NWA-TNA with his shooting star, so much so that a clip of it is still often used in commercials promoting upcoming pay-per-views. Perhaps the most famous shooting star press is one that missed—when Brock Lesnar came up frighteningly short on March 30, 2003, at WrestleMania XIX. Lesnar, who routinely used the move in OVW, waited until the main event of WrestleMania to show it to WWE fans, but his grueling match with Kurt Angle left him too fatigued to hit the move correctly. Lesnar isn't alone in his failure with the high-risk move. Hayabusa, the Japanese high-flyer who enjoyed his greatest fame in the 1990s, also missed his mark in a high-profile match. Hayabusa appeared at the 1994 Super J Cup hosted by New Japan and overshot a shooting star press badly, missing his opponent entirely.

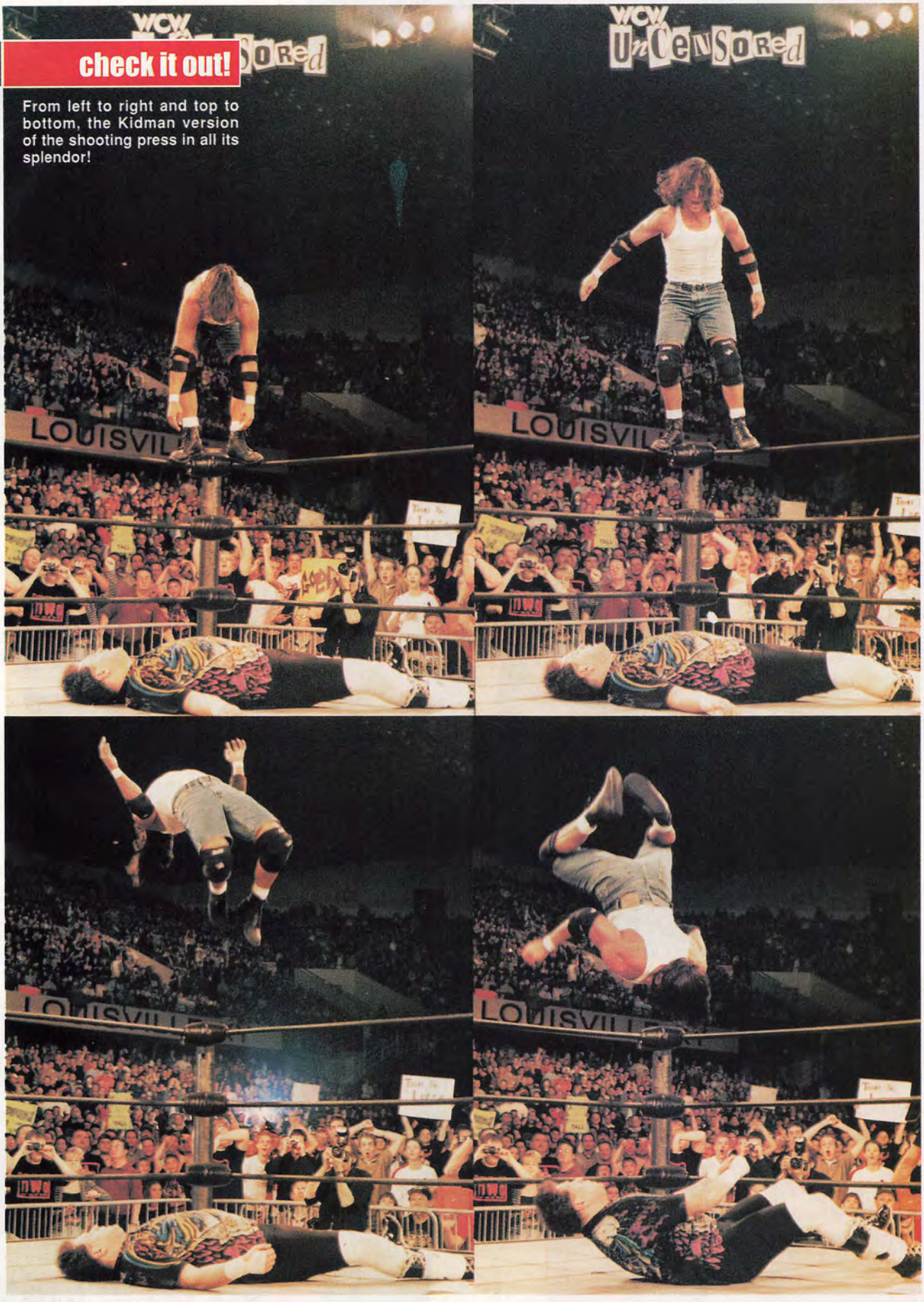
The scoop: It was a grisly scene in Tokyo on January 31, 1990. Naoki Sano, the reigning IWGP junior heavyweight champ, had torn apart the famed mask of Jushin Liger and bloodied him considerably in their title match. The blue New Japan ring canvas was stained by puddles of red. The throng of *puroresu* fans in attendance were whipped into a frenzy by the match, which would go down as an all-time classic. In the final seconds, Liger scaled the turnbuckles to the top rope, and with Sano on the mat below, he executed the first shooting star press in history. Liger used it only a handful of times before abandoning it as a finisher, but in the 14 years since the move first appeared on the scene, variations have proliferated. The move is sometimes executed from a springboard (Fleisch), or while a man is standing right next to his opponent on the mat (Red). Some wrestlers have performed the press to the floor by running down the apron of the ring (Kidman) and others have stood on the corner post and tried it as a suicide dive (Hector Garza).

The shooting star press helped current WWE wrestler Paul London defeat Chance Beckett in the finals of the 2003 Super 8.

How it's done: The shooting star press is typically executed from the top rope onto a supine opponent. This incredibly high-risk aerial move requires tremendous balance, leg strength, and control. Unlike a moonsault, in which the man executing it faces the audience, the shooting star press is done by facing toward the ring, and then leaping out from the top turnbuckle. The wrestler executing the move will perform a back flip as his body moves forward into the ring, eventually landing chest-to-chest on his opponent. The wrestler must rotate a full 270 degrees in the air to land properly. Any more than that and he will smash his knees into the mat—any less and he will spike himself head-first. □

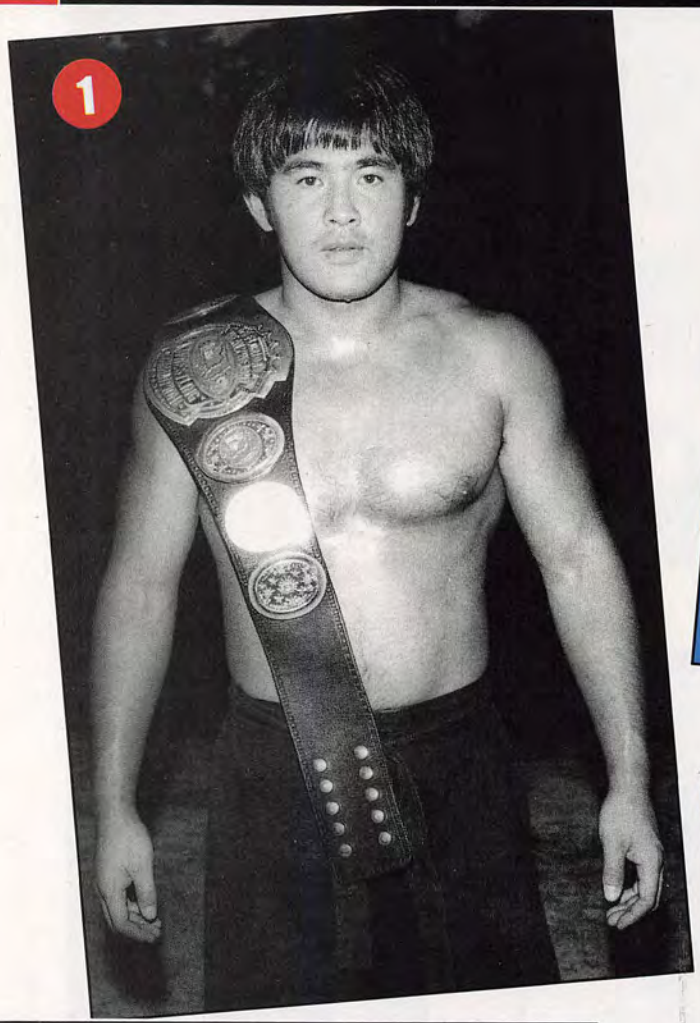
check it out!

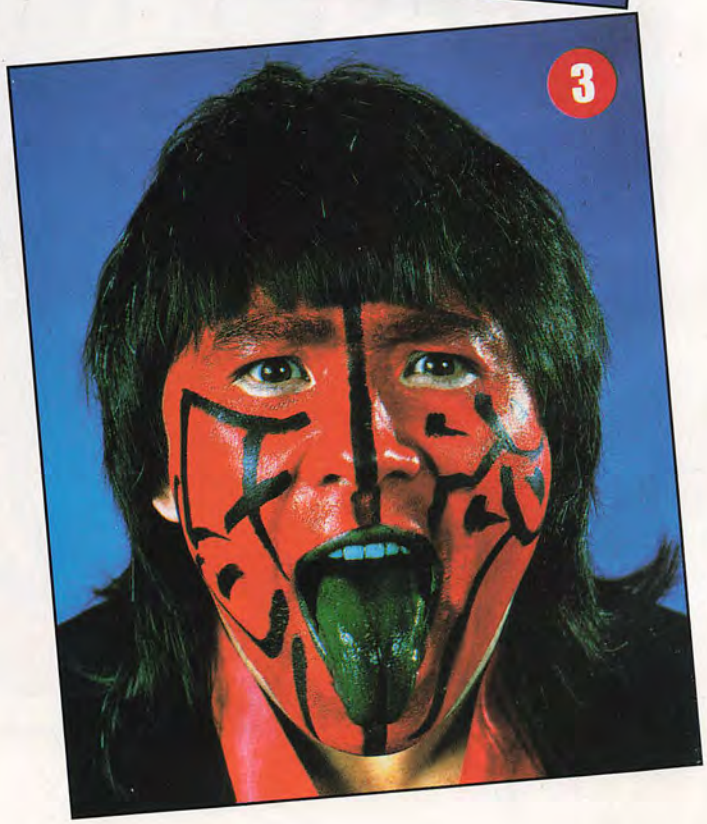
From left to right and top to bottom, the Kidman version of the shooting press in all its splendor!



It's amazing how drastically certain superstars change their looks over the years. A change in hair color or hairstyle here, a new ring outfit there, a few more tattoos here and there, or the mother of all changes ... the total gimmick overhaul. Every month, *PWI* will show you just how much one of your favorites has transformed himself. Yeah, it really is the same person in all these photos!

through the years





THE KEIJI MUTO FILES

1—As NWA Florida champ The White Ninja (1986)
2—Under his Great Muta hood (1989)
3—Ah, the brilliant red face paint (1989)
4—Spewing his trademark mist (1993)
5—With beard and IWGP belt (1995)
6—Muto and Chono: the NWO years (1997)
7—Seventh in the "500" that year (1999)
8—Now that's intimidating! (2004)

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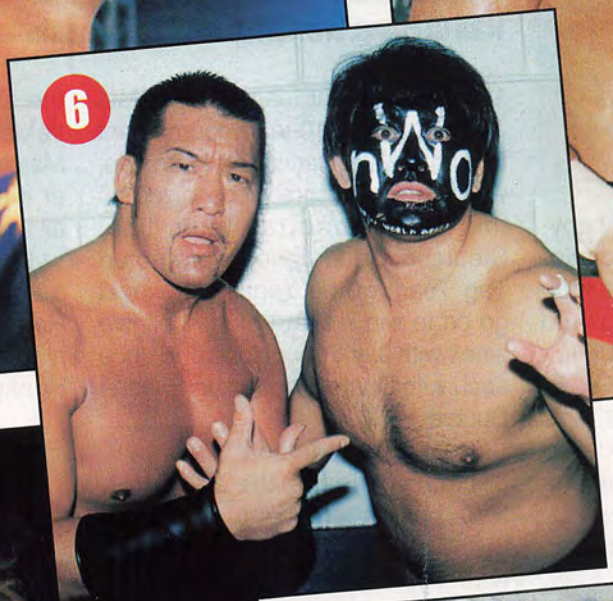
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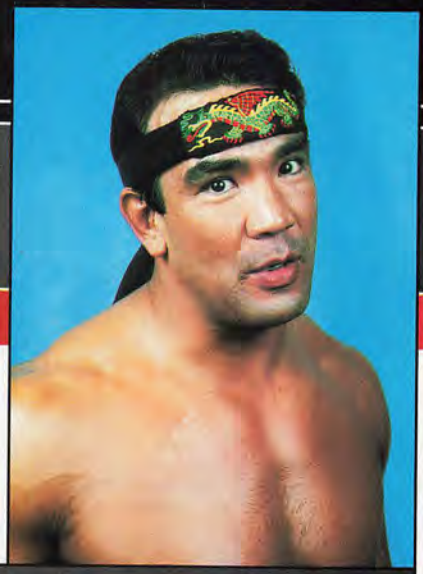


The Wrestling Observer
Hall of Fame

In each issue, *PWI* will honor one member of the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, which we recognize as the sport's official Hall of Fame

RICK STEAMBOAT

IF YOU WERE to look up "baby-face" in a pro wrestling dictionary (if there were such a thing), there's a good chance it would lead you to a picture of Rick Steamboat.

Steamboat was one of wrestling's most charismatic and beloved performers for two decades. He was also one of the sport's greatest in-ring technicians, delivering timeless classic matches against Ric Flair, Randy Savage, and others.

Steamboat was trained by Verne Gagne and The Iron Sheik and made his debut in 1976 at age 23. It didn't take long for the handsome Hawaiian to make a splash on the national stage, and he was voted Rookie of the Year in 1977.

On November 11, 1977, Steamboat defeated Flair to win the NWA U.S. title, a championship he would hold four times throughout his career. With his classic good looks, smooth technical skills, and graceful flying bodypress finisher, Steamboat was one of the NWA's top young lions of the 1970s. A few years later, he won a pair of Mid-Atlantic heavyweight titles, defeating The Iron Sheik (in 1980) and Ivan Koloff (in 1981).

Steamboat was equally as successful competing in singles and in tag team competition. On April 23, 1978, Steamboat teamed with Paul Jones to win a 10-team tournament to fill the Mid-Atlantic tag team title, which would become recognized as the NWA World tag team title. Steamboat and Jones were voted Tag Team of the Year. Rick would go on to win a share of the belt five times with Jay Youngblood and once each with Dustin Rhodes and Shane Douglas.

In 1985, Steamboat decided to leave the NWA behind, jumping to the WWF, where he was recast as "The Dragon." Steamboat emphasized his martial arts background and array of kicks and armdrags in the WWF and defeated Matt Borne on the undercard of WrestleMania I. He came of age in the WWF when he was viciously attacked by Jake Roberts and DDT'd on a concrete floor on *Saturday Night's Main Event.* Steamboat came back from the injury and destroyed Roberts in rematches, silencing critics who had labeled him too soft.

On March 29, 1987, Steamboat defeated Savage to capture the Intercontinental title in the show-stealing match of WrestleMania III. *PWI* readers voted it Match of the Year. Many still consider the best WrestleMania match of all-time.

However, Steamboat was always a better challenger than champion. He dropped the I-C strap in a stunning upset to the lightly regarded Honky Tonk Man just two months

It might not be considered an awe-inspiring move in 2004, but Rick Steamboat's flying bodypress was one of the most graceful and spectacular finishers when he was in his prime.

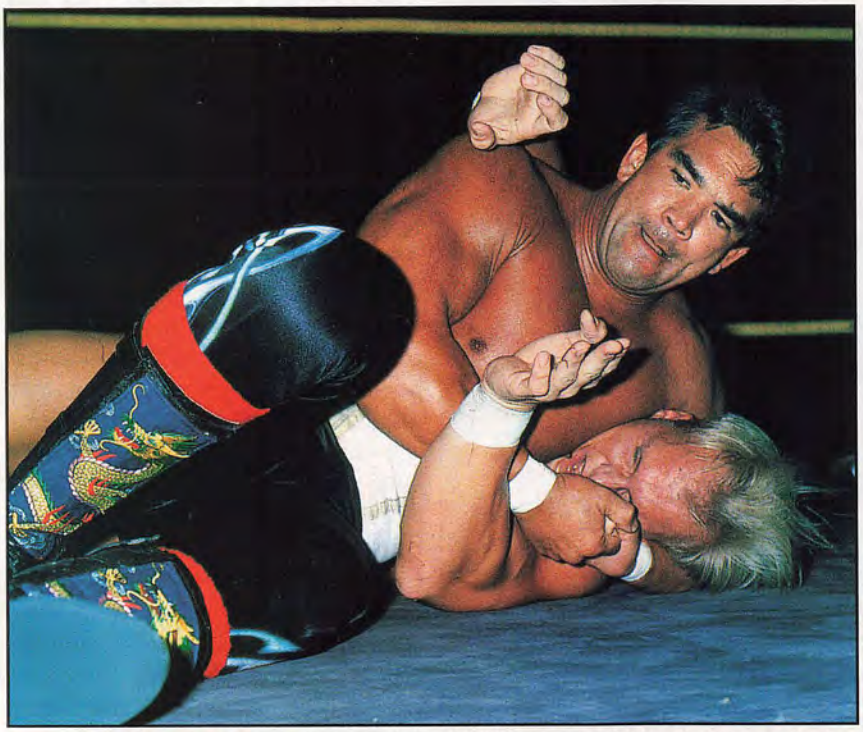
The zenith of Steamboat's career occurred on February 20, 1989, when he defeated Ric Flair, his greatest rival, to win the NWA World title. It'd be the only world championship he'd ever win as a single.

In addition to being a wonderful wrestler, Steamboat could be quite the showman, especially when he became the fire-breathing "Dragon."

later. Steamboat took a leave of absence for his son's birth, returning to the ring (with Ricky Jr.) at WrestleMania IV in a tournament for the WWF title. However, Steamboat lost to Valentine in the first round, frustrating fans who anticipated a Savage-Steamboat rematch.

Steamboat teased retirement before rejoining the NWA in January 1989 in surprising fashion, as Eddie Gilbert's mystery partner against Flair and Barry Windham. On February 20, 1989, Steamboat finally became NWA World champion, defeating Flair in Chicago. The resulting Flair-Steamboat showdowns were technical masterpieces.

In between classics against Flair, Steamboat made a successful defense against Tiger Mask (Mitsuharu Misawa) in Tokyo. The "Nature Boy" finally regained the belt on May 7, 1989, in another Match of the Year.



Steamboat defeated Steve Austin for both the WCW U.S. and TV titles, but it was also in a match with the future "Stone-Cold" that he suffered a career-ending back injury.

Steamboat would announce his retirement before reappearing in the WWF as a fire-breathing "Dragon." He returned to WCW in 1991, where he formed championship teams with Dustin Rhodes and Shane Douglas and feuded with Steve Austin over both the U.S. and TV titles. In 1994, a back injury forced Steamboat to vacate the U.S. title and, ultimately, to retire. In his last appearance on the national stage, he served as an on-air executive with NWA-TNA in 2002.

Shockingly, throughout his career, Steamboat never wrestled as a heel. Perhaps his frequent sabbaticals helped keep him fresh and popular with fans for 20 years. Or maybe it was just his amazing skills inside the squared circle. Steamboat was given the *PWI* Editors' Award in 1995 for lifetime achievement and inducted to the Hall of Fame the following year. □

independent roundup

By Liz Hunter

RING OF HONOR answered the collective Christmas wish of 1,500 *puroresu* fans by promoting a joint show with All-Japan Pro Wrestling in Philadelphia on December 27. It was ROH's largest crowd to date in Philly. The entire day was devoted to wrestling, with two separate cards in addition to an autograph convention. The AJPW contingent of **The Great Muta, Arashi, Satoshi Kojima, Tumeric Storm,** and **Kaz Hayashi** thrilled a crowd that might never see such an event again. For a more in-depth look at the show, please turn to page 48.

Also on the show, **Lucy Furr's** attacker was finally revealed. Several months ago, Lucy, the valet of **The Second City Saints,** was brutally attacked in an ROH locker room. Ever since then, **C.M. Punk, Ace Steel,** and **Colt Cabana** have been searching for the attacker to extract revenge. As Punk tried to ruin the show by repeatedly coming out and interrupting matches and interviews, he encountered **The Prophecy—Christopher Daniels, Dan Maff,** and **Allison Danger**—who he believed were the main suspects. As the SCS brawled with The Prophecy, **B.J. Whitmer** entered the fray and joined The Prophecy's side. Maff wasn't pleased and ended up fighting with Whitmer in the locker room afterward.

By the way, the All-Japan party headed to Texas the next day for another show held in conjunction with River City Wrestling. The crowd was smaller at the Woodlawn Gym in San Antonio, but the action was just as great.

We finally know who attacked Lucy Furr (inset) before a Ring of Honor show in August. She was just the first of several victims of B.J. Whitmer (above) as he rose up the rankings. Whitmer's evil ways have earned him a spot in The Prophecy.

NWA Mid-Atlantic successfully toured China in early-January. The tour featured the likes of **Lex Lovett, Mike Rapada, Chris Hamrick, Steve "Dr. Death" Williams,** and **Terry Taylor.** Each of the three shows drew between 3,000 and 6,000 fans. Everyone who attended seemed to enjoy the chance to see American-style pro wrestling. In other NWA news, former World champion **Dusty Rhodes** has joined the Board of Directors as an adviser. It is his desire to help the NWA become a major player again. Also joining the NWA is new associate member **Jim Gillenwater,** who will promote in Tennessee and Virginia.

Portland Wrestling is once again thriving. In December, Comcast Cable and Portland Wrestling announced a two-year deal to air the show, which coincided with the promotion getting a two-year deal with Kliever Armory to run TV tapings. The first TV taping featured many area standouts, like **Skag Rollins, Scotty Mac, Dr. Luther, Vance Nevada,** and **Tony Kozina.** The group plans to run monthly shows at the venue and should be a good outlet for Pacific Northwest talent.

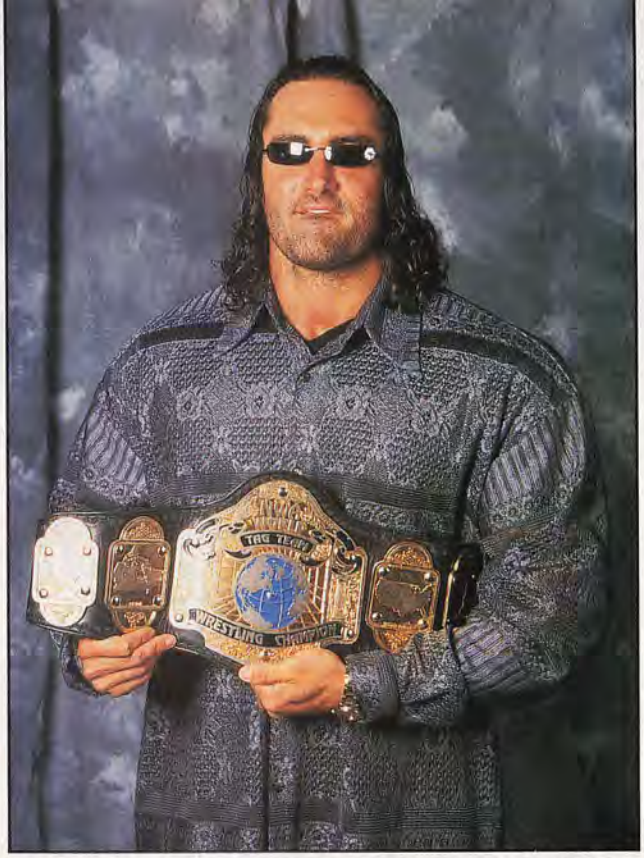
If you thought it was impossible for you to have a piece of **Jasmin St. Claire,** you'll enjoy this. Jasmin St. Claire Incorporated is set to go public with stock shares. Yes, this means JSC Inc. will be traded publicly and will be available on NASDAQ soon. The initial public offering is being handled by **Yan Skwara** of San Diego-based Pan American Relations. When not busy with her 3PW duties, Jasmin has been busy cultivating an online casino, numerous Web sites, modeling, and acting—and her very own action figure is set to be released as well!

Jersey All Pro Wrestling is retir-

ing its TV title and will now recognize the light heavyweight champion as the number-one contender to the heavyweight title. Added bonus: If the light heavyweight champ successfully defends the title seven times, he will receive a shot at the heavyweight belt. The current light heavyweight champ, **Azreal,** is significantly smaller than current heavyweight champ Dan Maff. This could lead to an interesting test for Maff if Azreal continues to hold his belt.

Roman won the Independent Wrestling Federation's annual Tournament of Champions on December 27. The two-day tournament featured the finest from IWF. Roman also won the tournament in 2002 ... **Justin 2 Fine** and manager **Rick Vovk** must serve as **C-Diddy's** slave for 60 days after Fine lost a stipulation match to Diddy on a PCW show in Arlington, Texas.

Quick title changes: Prime Time Wrestling, Georgetown, KY, December 28: **Little Larry D** beat U.S. champion **Michael Payne** in best-of-three-falls match to win the title ... ***Universal Championship Wrestling, Greenville, SC, December 27:*** **Jeff Lewis** won a six-man cruiserweight royal rumble to win the American junior heavyweight title ... **Rick Morton** beat **George South Sr.** to win the American heavyweight title ... **Johnny Swinger** beat **NWO Sting** in the finals of a tournament to win the universal title ... ***Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling, Burlington, NC, December 27:*** **Krazy K** defeated **Kamakazi Kid** to win the rising generation league title ... **Gemini Kid** and **Mikael Yamaha** defeated tag champions **The Brads** to win the title ... **Ric Converse** defeated heavyweight champion **Corey Edsel** to win the title ... ***National Wrestling Superstars, Perth Amboy, NJ, December 27:*** **TNT** defeated regional heavyweight champion **Biggie Biggs** to win the title ... **Rob Eckos** defeated **Mike Kruel** to capture the junior heavyweight title ... ***Next Generation Wrestling, Peoria, IL, December 20:*** **Chris Brown** defeated hardcore champion **Scott Keyes** to win the title ... **Scott Keyes** defeated hardcore champion **Chris Brown** to win the title ... ***Southern Wrestling Alliance, Huntsville, TN, December 20:*** **The Orphan** and **C.J. Summers** defeated tag team champions **The Weapons of Mass Destruction** to win the title ... **Hayley Hatred** pinned women's champion **Tiffani Monroe** to win the title ... **Hex Hatred** pinned cruiserweight champion **C.J. Summers** to win the title ... ***Professional Championship Wrestling, Arlington, TX, December 20:*** **Mike Foxx** beat heavyweight champ **Shadow** in a best-of-three-falls match to win the title ... ***All-Star Wrestling Network, Fort Valley, GA, December 20:*** **The Rock 'n' Roll Express** defeated tag team champs **Rowdy Matiz** and **Big Daddy Dangerously** to win the title ... ***Ground Breaking Wrestling, Hanover, PA, December 19:*** **Buster Macabbi** pinned **Blaine Barret** in the final match of a tournament to declare a new Breaker champ ... **Travis D** beat **Quinn Nash** in the final match of a tournament to declare a new heavyweight champion ...



Johnny Swinger must have felt awkward without the NWA tag team title belt. Needing a belt to hold, he defeated two men in a tournament to win the UCW universal title. Now he again has a belt to clutch during photo shoots.

Xtreme Championship Wrestling, Denton, TX, December 19: **Team Extreme** beat **Bull** and **D-Money** to win the tag team title ... ***Premier Championship Wrestling, Loyall, KY, December 15:*** **Overkill** defeated hardcore champ **Chris Taylor** to regain the title ... ***Tristate Championship Wrestling, Rogersville, TN, December 13:*** **Big Country** won a four-way match against **Tennessee Thumper, Brian Wayne,** and **Chris Carro** to win the hardcore title... **Ray Idol** defeated North American champ **Major Havoc** to win the title ... ***Eastern Wrestling Alliance, Southbridge, MA, December 13:*** **Chi Chi Cruz** pinned New England champion **Adam Booker** to win the title ... ***Combat Zone Wrestling, Philadelphia, PA, December 13:*** **Jimmy Rave** defeated iron man champ **Trent Acid** to win the title... **Sonjay Dutt** defeated junior heavyweight champ **Ruckus** to win the title ... ***Steel Rage Pro Wrestling, Tulsa, OK, December 13:*** **X-Cal** defeated light heavyweight champ **Anarchy** to win the title ... **Leather** defeated women's champ **Ares** to win the title ... ***Cleveland All Pro Wrestling, Cleveland, OH, December 7:*** **Chad Collyer** defeated **Adam Cage** to win the heavyweight title ... ***World Wrestling Association, Fort Wayne, IN, December 7:*** **Danny Daniels** defeated **Jimmy Jacobs** to win the cruiserweight belt ... ***Chaotic Wrestling, Methuen, MA, December 5:*** **Brian Buffet** and **Peter Mulloy** defeated tag champs **Brian Black** and **The Mighty Mini** to win the title. □

the international report

By Mike Spillane

NEW YEAR'S EVE is a time for celebration—unless you work for New Japan Pro Wrestling. This year, with three Japanese television networks offering competing mixed martial arts programs on the night of December 31, a number of pro wrestlers looking to skyrocket into superstardom gambled their careers.

The result was embarrassing, not just for *puroresu,* but for New Japan in particular. For starters, the reigning IWGP heavyweight champion, 23-year-old rookie **Shinsuke Nakamura**, did fairly well, but ultimately went down to defeat at K-1's "Dynamite At The Nagoya Dome." **Alexey Ignashov** won a controversial decision after a knee to the head and eye sent Nakamura crashing to the mat and the referee stopped the match. The champion of New Japan Pro Wrestling was furious about what he and many others thought was a premature stoppage, no doubt because the reputation of the promotion was squarely on his shoulders that night in the Nagoya Dome. After the fight, it was determined that Ignashov had done some serious damage to Nakamura's eye, and 48 hours later, it was announced that he would be forced to vacate the IWGP championship he had won from **Hiroyoshi Tenzan** three weeks earlier. Early reports stated that Nakamura might be sidelined for four months with the injury.

As if that wasn't enough, former IWGP heavyweight champion **Yuji Nagata** lasted only about a minute with Pride champion **Fedor Emelianenko** at Kobe Wing Stadium. The man known as "Mr. IWGP" was certainly out of his element here, despite having tried his hand at fighting once before. Earlier on the same card, other New Japan regulars were manhandled by mixed martial artists, and the losses by **Tadao Yasuda** (knocked out in 52 seconds) and **Kazunari Murakami** (knocked out in 64 seconds) only left NJPW with egg on its face.

Only seasoned fighters like **Josh Barnett** and **Kazuyuki Fujita** fared well in representing *puroresu,* but the evening's embarrassments easily outweighed the little glory the show brought to New Japan. The continued blending of mixed martial arts and pro wrestling might be drawing some large audiences, but it seems to be instilling a sense of morbid curiosity in viewers, who are interested in seeing just how bad some of the beatings handed out will be. How New Japan will salvage its stars' reputations after New Year's Eve is an unenviable challenge.

The original **La Parka, Adolfo Tapia,** made history last year when, without having lost his mask, he revealed his true identity to Lucha fans in an attempt to avoid further confusion. With Mexico full of bogus and alternate La Parkas, Tapia wanted to try to firmly establish himself as the real deal, since he was the first person to don the skeleton costume. Since then, **Super Parka** has lost his mask, and an American impostor has been revealed. **Antonio Pena,** the owner of AAA, claims rights to the Parka character he created,

Yuji "Mr. IWGP" Nagata wasn't in a celebratory mood after he tangled with Pride champion Fedor Emelianenko on New Year's Eve and lost in about a minute. It was another bad night for the New Japan stars who tried their luck against top mixed martial artists.

and rightly so—he has even won a legal injunction to that effect. So, after a number of name changes, Tapia has decided to call himself **La Park,** and to better distinguish himself, has announced that he will be modifying the classic Parka costume. In recent weeks, La Park has been appearing on CMLL television broadcasts in trios matches, and his popularity is growing quickly. CMLL airs in the same television programming block as AAA on Galavision, meaning that both Lucha Libre shows now have a Parka.

A contingent of top talent from the ailing All-Japan Pro Wrestling promotion recently visited the United States in time for the holiday season. AJPW President **Keiji "The Great Muta" Muto** was joined by his tag team partner, **Arashi,** as well as **Satoshi Kojima, Kaz Hayashi, Kazushi Miyamoto,** and **Tomoaki Honma,** for a short stay and vacation from life in the Far East. Their first stop was in Philadelphia, as they appeared with Ring of Honor in front of the promotion's largest crowd on December 27.

Muta and Arashi defended their All-Japan tag team title against **Christopher Daniels** and **Dan Maff,** while **A.J. Styles** defeated Hayashi, Kojima beat **Homicide,** and Honma and Miyamoto went down in defeat to **C.M. Punk** and **Colt Cabana.** *(For more on ROH/AJPW, check out the story on page 48.)* The next night, the results were more lopsided, as the All-Japan team headed to San Antonio to appear with River City Wrestling. There, Muta and Arashi beat **Pete Lothario** and **Hotstuff Hernandez,** Hayashi defeated **Jeremy Lopez,** and Kojima pinned **Black Gordman Jr.** The All-Japan office might send wrestlers to the States more frequently after this visit, but their stays will probably always be brief. All six AJPW wrestlers, having spent Christmas here in the States, were back home in Japan to kick-start the next tour at Korakuen Hall the day after New Year's.

The American independents are getting much more international exposure than ever before, and have been reaching into Mexico, Canada, Puerto Rico, Europe, and Japan with greater frequency. **Bryan "American Dragon" Danielson** and **Chris Hero** both recently returned from tours of England, while **Nick Berk** and **Tom Carter** will have made their England debuts by the time you read this. **Richard Slinger** and **Ace Steel** both appear regularly with **Mitsuharu Misawa's** Pro Wrestling NOAH in Japan, and **Zandig** recently popped up in Zero-One.

Other Americans that appear full-time in Japan include Jeremy Lopez (Osaka Pro and All-Japan) and **Michael Modest** (NOAH.) NWA-TNA regulars **Michael Shane** and **David Young** saw action south of the border in AAA, and **The Havana Pit Bulls** continue to impress in CMLL. In Puerto Rico, it's common to see the likes of **David Flair** and **Flash Flanagan** on cards, and stars from TNA also make frequent visits.

The cast of Combat Zone Wrestling tends to show up on occasion in Italy, while in Germany, the two most prominent championships, the wXw heavyweight title and cruiserweight titles are held by Americans **Jimmy Jacobs** and **Mike Quackenbush,** respectively. The Canadian independents have been trading talent back and forth with their American counterparts for years, and recent visits from men like **Johnny Ova** and Christopher Daniels have helped sustain interest. For the first time in years, a wrestling tour has crossed China, and remarkably enough, it was one promoted by NWA Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling! Beyond that, American independent wrestlers have been showing up everywhere from Australia to Africa, and fame for some of the States' smaller companies is at an all-time high.

You might not know the name Jeremy Lopez, but he is becoming quite the international star. Not only is this American independent wrestler seeing regular action for All-Japan and Osaka Pro, but he also got to battle one of All-Japan's finest in the U.S. this winter.

Bayamon, Puerto Rico, has long been a hotbed for wrestling, but a recent IWA show in that city saw things not just get hot, but outright overheat. During a steel cage match involving **Vampiro, Ricky Banderas,** and others, a small riot broke out in the crowd of more than 10,000. Police attempted to quell the uprising, only to have an officer dragged into the growing melee. As the riot escalated to frightening proportions, the wrestlers took up steel chairs and began pounding their way through the audience, coming to the aid of police until order could be restored. The riot squad was called to assist once things reached an uncontrollable pitch. The remainder of the event had to be canceled. □

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Sept. 1981: Patera & The Freebirds: The Unholy Alliance Seeks To Cripple Ted DiBiase. Also: Junkyard Dog, Dory Funk Jr., Killer Khan, Ivan Koloff.

March 1982: Backlund-Valentine Death Match: The WWF Title Is Back Where It Belongs. Also: Austin Idol, Spoiler, Tommy Rich, Brisco-DiBiase.

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Dec. 1982: Andre vs. Mulligan: The Giant Is Mightier Than The Claw. Also: Grand Wizard, Jerry Lawler, Rich-Heenan, Jack Brisco.

Feb. 1983: Rhodes vs. Funk: The Bloody Horror Of A Barbed Wire Fence Match. Also: Ted DiBiase, Andre-Orton Jr., Hogan & Patera, Flair-Hansen.

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April 1984: Rick Steamboat Quits Wrestling! The *Real* Story Behind His Most Painful Decision. Also: Masked Superstar-Mulligan, Adams-Garvin, Barry Windham, Ric Flair.

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July 1984: Ric Flair Brings The World Title To The New York Area: A Night Of Champions At The Meadowlands. Also: Martel-Bravo, Mr. Wrestling II, Jumbo Tsuruta.

Aug. 1984: Junkyard Dog Joins Jim Valiant's Boogie Woogie Brigade. Also: Steve O-Zbyszko, Magnum-Wrestling II, Austin Idol, Sugar-Spoiler.

Sept. 1984: Rick Martel Dethrones Jumbo Tsuruta: Finally, An AWA Champion To Be Proud Of. Also: Brody-LeDuc, Iron Sheik, Kerry Von Erich, Rock 'n' Roll Express.

Oct. 1984: Collision Of The Florida Musclemen: Can Billy Jack Squeeze Superstar Graham Out Of Wrestling? Also: Road Warriors, Flair-Steamboat, Eddie Gilbert, Orndorff & Shultz-Atlas & Johnson.

Nov. 1984: Dusty Rhodes: Champion Of Champions ... And Still The Lord Of The Ring. Also: Rich-Gilbert, Gino Hernandez, Road Warriors, JYD-Reed.

Dec. 1984: How Hulkamania Trampled Big John Studd. Also: Road Warriors, Magnum T.A., Wahoo McDaniel, Sullivan-Rhodes.

March 1985: He's Back And Better Than Ever: Backlund-A-Mania Is Sweeping The Nation! Also: Koloffs, Billy Jack, Von Erichs-Devastation Inc.

June 1985: Sgt. Slaughter Topples Ric Flair—So Why Isn't He Champion? Also: Ellering & Road Warriors, Koloffs & Khrushchev-Von Erichs, Kevin Von Erich, Andre & JYD.

Sept. 1985: A Psychologist Examines "Rowdy" Roddy Piper! Is He As Crazy As You Think He Is? Also: Magnum-Blanchard, Fantastics, Ric Flair, Gagne & Sammartino.

Jan. 1986: Rick Steamboat vs. Magnificent Muraco: The Volcano Rumbles. Also: Warriors & Ellering, Mike Von Erich, Jake Roberts, Koloff & Khrushchev-Rock 'n' Rolls.

March 1986: Barry Windham & Mike Rotundo: Will Their Reunion Spell Disaster For Kendall Windham? Also: Studd-Hillbilly, Rick Rude, Jerry Lawler, Russians-Road Warriors.

April 1986: Starrcade's Over, But The Feud Rages On: Dusty Rhodes And Ric Flair Cannot Survive '86! Also: Andre-Heenan, Bill Watts, Scott Hall, Lance Von Erich.

June 1986: Barry Windham's NWA Mission: Humiliate Ric Flair! Also: Nord-Road Warriors, British Bulldogs, L. Von Erich-One Man Gang, Tully Blanchard.

July 1986: All-American Special Issue: Sgt. Slaughter, Hulk Hogan, Magnum T.A. Also: Ivan Koloff, Rude-Lance Von Erich.

Aug. 1986: WrestleMania 2: Hulk Hogan's Night Of Redemption. Also: Jim & Ron Garvin, Steve Williams, Rick Martel, Sir Oliver Humperdink.

Sept. 1986: Dusty Rhodes & Magnum T.A.: America's Team Is Not Out For Glory ... It's Out For Revenge! Also: Andre-Hogan, Chris Adams, Barry Windham, Scott Hall.

Oct. 1986: The NWA Championship Sinks To A New Low: Ric Flair Needs 10 Thugs To Defeat Lex Luger! Also: Road Warriors, Randy Savage, Verne Gagne, Fantastics-Sheepherders.

Nov. 1986: Paul Ellering's Own Story: "How My Road Warriors Made Dusty Rhodes NWA Champion." Also: Adams-Rude, British Bulldogs, Bockwinkel-Hansen, Bill Watts.

Dec. 1986: Rock 'n' Roll Revival: Morton And Gibson Regain The NWA World Tag Title! Also: Lex Luger, Hogan-Adonis, Hall-DeBeers, Baby Doll.

Jan. 1987: The New Roddy Piper: Why The Fans Love Him ... But Why They Should Hate Him! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Rude-Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow.

Feb. 1987: Hogan, Piper, Orndorff: The WWF's Hate Triangle. Also: Terry Taylor, Ric Flair, Midnight Rockers, Kevin Von Erich.

March 1987: Happy Anniversary, Hulk Hogan! The WWF Champion Celebrates Three Years At The Top. Also: Ric Flair, Missy-Gilbert, Lex Luger, Bulldogs, Koloffs.

April 1987: Steamboat & Windham: Manny Happy Returns! Also: Paul Ellering, Hacksaw Duggan, prospects.

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June 1987: Nikita Koloff's Mission: Saddle The Horsemen And Trample Lex Luger! Also: Roddy Piper, Adams & Taylor, Bruiser Brody, Scott Hall.

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Oct. 1987: The Rock 'n' Roll Express Win Their Fourth NWA Title. Also: Hogan-Bigelow, Rhodes-Blanchard, scaffold, Kevin Sullivan.

Nov. 1987: Special Fan Poll: Should Mr. T Be Allowed To Referee? Also: War Games, Bulldogs, Condrey & Rose, Dusty Rhodes.

Dec. 1987: Rhodes Challenges Luger: Will Dusty's U.S. Title Hopes Split The Superpowers? Also: Hayes-Bubba, Magnum T.A., Randy Savage, Al Perez.

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Feb. 1988: A Special Analysis By Jesse Ventura: Randy Savage Has Wimped Out! Also: Stirling, R&Rs-Blanchard & Anderson, Kevin Von Erich, Dangerously-Lawler-Dundee.

March 1988: Bam Bam Bigelow: Wrestling's Most Dangerous Man. Also: Adams-Perez, Nikita Koloff, Honky Tonk, Freebirds.

May 1988: Million-Dollar Middleman: The Future Of The WWF Is In Ted DiBiase's Hands. Also: Zbyszko & Baby Doll, Road Warriors-Konga & Warlord, Fritz Von Erich, Rockers-Express.

June 1988: The Noble Savage: How Beauty Killed The Beast Within "The Macho Man." Also: Warriors-Warlord & Barbarian, R&R Express, Baby Doll, G. Gagne-Hennig.

July 1988: A Toast To Wrestling's Odd Couple: Kerry Von Erich & Michael Hayes Unite! Also: DiBiase-Savage-Hogan, Dillon & Horsemen, Sting, Rick Steamboat.

Aug. 1988: What Randy Savage Must Do To Escape The Shadow Of Hulk Hogan. Also: Hyatt-Gilbert, Sting, Michael Hayes, Honky Tonk.

Oct. 1988: Preview & Analysis: Megapowers vs. Megabucks. Also: Horsemen, Jerry Lawler, Warlord & Barbarian, Dangerously-Gilbert, Beefcake-Honky Tonk.

Nov. 1988: Dusty Rhodes vs. Barry Windham: The Night The Teacher Learned A Lesson. Also: Kerry-Lawler, Lex Luger, Muraco-Valentine, Freebirds.

Dec. 1988: Exclusive "Hotseat" Interview: Roddy Piper—Will He Ever Be Back? Also: Powers of Pain, Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, Bambi-Mystic, Kevin Von Erich.

Feb. 1989: Tully & Arn Will Fall Under Bobby Heenan! A Special Analysis By J.J. Dillon. Also: Hogan-Bossman, Sgt. Slaughter, Lawler-INSIDE WRESTLING, Davis-Wayne.

June 1989: Finally, Fortune Favors The Challenger: Rick Steamboat Wins Ric Flair's NWA Belt! Also: Morton & Gibson, Macho Madness-Hulkamania, Lex Luger, Jimmy Jack Funk.

Aug. 1989: Your Ballots Are In: Hulkamania Rules! Also: Tanaka & Diamond, Rick Steamboat, Bigelow-Rhodes, Rick Rude, Jim Cornette.

Sept. 1989: Savage Is Shamed By Hogan—Only Elizabeth Can Save Him Now. Also: Lex Luger, Mil Mascaras, Dusty Rhodes, Bushwhackers, Skandor Akbar.

Oct. 1989: Dusty Rhodes' WWF Hit List. Also: Hall-Pillman-Vicious, Curt Hennig, Warriors, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

Nov. 1989: Please, Elizabeth—Don't Wrestle Sherri! Also: Mil Mascaras, Dangerously-Cornette, Sting-T. Funk, Lex Luger, Jake Roberts.

Dec. 1989: The Dusty Road Is Paved With Gold: The American Dream Lives On! Also: Ric Flair, Hogan-Zeus, Embry-Chu-hi, Lex Luger, Larry Zbyszko.

Jan. 1990: Why Sting's Friendship Is Tearing Ric Flair Apart! Also: Roberts-DiBiase, Rock 'n' Rolls, Lawler-Embry, Hulk Hogan, Paul E. Dangerously.

Feb. 1990: Sex Symbol Showdown: Rude's Out ... Piper's In ... And The Fans Love It! Also: Warriors-Skyscrapers, Jimmy Snuka, Tom Zenk, Destruction Crew, Kerry Von Erich

March 1990 (Special Issue): The '80s: A Rousing Review Of A Dynamic Decade. Also: Bobby Heenan, Ric Flair, Paul Orndorff.

April 1990: Starrcade '89: Night Of The Iron Men. Also: Warrior-Hogan, Dustin Rhodes, Buzz Sawyer, WWF shuffle.

May 1990: WrestleMania VI Main Event: Hulk Hogan vs. Ultimate Warrior: Exclusive Preview & Analysis. Also: Jerry Lawler, Al Perez, Lex Luger, Woman, LPWA.

June 1990: Tragedy Strikes Sting! How You Can Help Speed His Recovery. Also: Saito-Zbyszko, Earthquake, Ultimate Warrior, Jeff Jarrett.

July 1990: Our Urgent Plea To Hulk Hogan & The Ultimate Warrior: Team Up And Eliminate These Men. Also: Steiners, Sting, Earthquake, Kokina Maximus, Tessa.

Aug. 1990: The Experts Agree: Lex Luger Has Made Ric Flair A Broken Man. Also: Hulk Hogan, Ultimate Warrior, Pillman & Zenk, Terry Taylor, Jerry Lawler.

Sept. 1990: Fighting Fire With Fire: The Awesome Foursome—Committed To Destroying The Horsemen. Also: Hulk Hogan, Hacksaw Duggan, JYD, Adams-Jeannie, Midnight Express.

Oct. 1990: Sting: "I Feel Like I've Conquered The World!" Also: Legion of Doom, Bushwhackers, El Gigante, Mike Rotundo, Juice Patrol.

Nov. 1990: Ric Flair & Hulk Hogan: A Tale Of Two Ex-Champions. Also: Sid Vicious, Sgt. Slaughter, Jeannie-Toni, Mr. Fuji & Orient Express.

Dec. 1990: Halloween Havoc Horror! Why Sting Is Spooked By Sid Vicious. Also: Hulk Hogan, Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Larry Zbyszko.

Jan. 1991: Warning To The Ultimate Warrior: The Legion Of Doom Will Lead You To Destruction. Also: Paul E. Dangerously, Chris Adams, Steiners, Lawler-T. Funk.

Feb. 1991: Our Plan For The "Hulkster" To Regain The WWF World Belt. Also: Terry Taylor, Rick Martel, Sting & Simmons, all-annoying, Stan Hansen.

March 1991: The Earthquake Feud Rumbles On: Will Hulk Hogan Be The Victim Of His Own Deadly Obsession? Also: Roberts-Martel, Sting-Hansen, Keirn-Perez, Barry Windham.

April 1991: The Steiners: They'd Be Wrestling's Greatest Tag Team, But ... Also: Eddie Gilbert, Flair-Sting, Steiners, Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Sgt. Slaughter.

May 1991: Savage vs. Warrior: The Bloodlust Of Ex-Champions. Also: Steiners, Sting, Virgil, D. Sammartino-I. Koloff.

June 1991: Steiners, LOD: Tag Team Thunder. Also: Steve Williams, Nikita Koloff, I-C belt, Dundees, Arn Anderson.

July 1991: Hogan's Burning Mad! Beating Slaughter For The Title Was Not Enough. Also: Virgil, Nastys, Steiners, Dan Spivey, Terry Funk.

Aug. 1991: Are The Steiners Getting Too Cocky For Their Own Good? Also: Jerry Lawler, Rick Steamboat, Warrior-Undertaker, Dustin Rhodes. Flair-Windham.

Sept. 1991: Justice Is In The WWF ... And Hogan's In The Biggest Trouble Of His Life! Also: Missy-Paul E., Rick Rude, Curt Hennig, Stevie Ray, Diamond Exchange.

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Nov. 1991: Our Investigation Reveals ... The Truth Behind The Hogan-Savage Connection. Also: Lex Luger, Ric Flair, War Games, Mounties, foreign objects.

Dec. 1991: A Night To Remember: SummerSlam Provides Heat For The Cold Months Ahead. Also: Alexandra York, Simmons-Luger, Lane & Cornette, Leatherface.

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Feb. 1992: A Reign Of Pain: Lex Luger—The Agony Of A World Champion. Also: Bret Hart, Patriot, Rick Rude, Enforcers, Thesz & Rogers.

March 1992: Who's Winning The Hogan-Flair Wars? Also: Steiners, Survivor Series, Enforcers-Rhodes & Steamboat, Johnny B. Badd.

May 1992: War! WrestleMania Will Be Sid And Hulk's Battleground. Also: Jushin Liger, Eddie Gilbert, Repo Man, Austin-Blossom, Tri-State & UWF.

June 1992: Sting: A New Champion, A New Era. Also: Hulk Hogan, Harley Race, Marcus Bagwell, Tony Atlas, IRS & DiBiase.

July 1992: Is Regaining The WWF Title An Impossible Undertaking? Also: Sherri & Shawn, Big Van Vader, Gordy & Williams, Kamala, Joe Savoldi.

Aug. 1992: The Closer Flair Gets ... The More Savage "Macho Man" Becomes. Also: Jack-Badd, Brian Christopher, LOD & Ellering, Taylor & Valentine, Dusty Wolfe.

Sept. 1992: Hulk Hogan's "Retirement": Why The WWF Will Never Let Him Rest In Peace. Also: War Games, Big Van Vader, Kamala, Marty Jannetty, U.K.

Oct. 1992: SummerSlam '92: Exclusive Preview & Analysis. Also: S. Steiner-Muta, Ron Simmons, Eddie Gilbert, Eric Embry.

Nov. 1992: The Great American Crash: Vader Crushes Sting For The WCW World Title. Also: Ric Flair, Ultimate Warrior, Madusa, Warlord & Barbarian-Bushwhackers, top rope rule.

Dec. 1992: Hey, Ric Flair: Stop Whining And Start Winning. Also: Razor Ramon, Heavenly Bodies, Jeff Jarrett, Windham & D. Rhodes, NWA title.

March 1993: Who Controls The Balance Of Power In The WWF? Also: Shawn Michaels, Nikita Koloff, Windham-Dustin, Survivor Series, Rod Price.

April 1993: New Blood! The Wrestlers Who Could Revitalize The WWF In '93. Also: Z-Man & Gunn, Sting-Vader, Dangerous Alliance, Ric Flair.

May 1993: Exclusive WrestleMania IX Match Analysis. Also: Andre the Giant, Pillman & Austin, Great Muta, Headshrinkers-Steiners, 2 Cold Scorpio.

Jan. 1994 (Special Edition): Wrestling's Seasonal Spectaculars—WWF SummerSlam, WCW Fall Brawl. Also: Rick Martel, Razor Ramon, Steven

Regal, Paul Orndorff, Mascaras-Liger, ECW baseball bat matches.

Feb. 1994: Our Holiday Wish List For 1994. Also: Hogan-Savage-Bret, Hacksaw Duggan, Doinks, Hollywood Blonds, Steven Regal.

April 1994 (Special Issue): The INSIDE WRESTLING Computer Tournament. Also: Lex Luger, Starrcade, Yoko-Fuji, Ric Flair, Curt Hennig, Funk-Sabu.

May 1994: Lex Luger & Bret Hart: Their Greatest Triumphs, Their Gravest Tragedies. Also: Flair-Rude, Rick Morton, Heenan-Bockwinkel, Brian Christopher, Yoko-Booger.

June 1994: Wake Up, Rick Steamboat: Ric Flair Is Still "Slick" Ric! Also: Jimmy Snuka, Tony Anthony, IRS, Bruise Brothers, Alundra Blayze, Freebirds.

July 1994 (Special Issue): A Look Into Wrestling's Future: You Won't Believe What You'll See! Also: Ron Simmons, Sting, Earthquake-Booger, Bob Armstrong, Diesel.

Oct. 1994 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Doink, Vader-Race, Mabel, Dory Funk Jr., Owen-Bret, Hall of Fame.

March 1995: Predictions 1995. Also: Nastys, Razor Ramon, Tasmaniac, Kid-Man O' War, Pillman & Hogan.

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Jan. 1996: Our Holiday Wish List For 1996! Also: Scott Norton, Sid Vicious, Psicosis-Misterio, Barry Horowitz, Sabu.

Feb. 1996: Wrestling's Top Stars: What 1996 Has In Store For Them! Also: Goldust, Sherri-Parker, Mikey Whipwreck, Smokin' Gunns.

March 1996: His Excellency! How Bret Master-minded Diesel's Execution. Also: Jeff Jarrett, Giant, Jim Cornette, Survivor Series, Eddie Guerrero.

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Nov. 1996: The Steiners: Feasting On A Buffet Of Violence. Also: Shawn Michaels, Sabu-Douglas, King of Ring, Eddie Guerrero, truck stop terror.

Dec. 1996: Three Women For Four Horsemen? The Hot Search For A Fourth Filly Has Begun! Also: Sunny & Gunns, Giant, Goldust, Cornette & Hart, Jerry Jarrett.

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Feb. 1997: Trouble In Egoville: Is There An NWO Within The NWO? Also: Chris Candido, Bret-Shawn, Ric Flair, Joey Styles, Liger-Benoit.

June 1997: Ahmed Johnson Reveals: "I Almost Joined The Nation Of Domination." Also: Mankind, Lex Luger, NWO, Davey Boy Smith, Jerry Graham.

Oct. 1997 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: LOD-PG-13, Rob Van Dam, Flair & Horsemen, Ken Shamrock, McMichael-White, Madd & Mama Maxxine.

Nov. 1997: WWF War Zone: Interfederation Battles Rock The Sport! Also: Ahmed Johnson, Curt Hennig, *Nueva* World Order, Chris Candido, Dan Severn.

Dec. 1997: Losing Is Bull! Has Dennis Rodman Had It With Hulk Hogan? Also: Steve Austin, Jarrett & Debra, Harts, Funk-Francine, Chris Jericho.

Holiday 1997 (Special Issue): The Steiners' Million-Dollar Gamble! Also: 1998 calendar, Alex Wright, The Patriot, Sgt. Slaughter, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards.

Jan. 1998: Our Holiday Wish List For The Stars (Sable). Also: Bret Hart, Rey Misterio Jr., Steve Austin, Roddy Piper, Fritz Von Erich.

Feb. 1998: Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For '98. Also: Brian Pillman, Sting, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Reckless Youth.

March 1998: Hart Transplant! The Truth Behind Bret's Defection To WCW. Also: Steve McMichael, Bam Bam Bigelow, Steve Austin, Disco Inferno.

April 1998 (Special Issue): The 1998 INSIDE WRESTLING Computer Tournament. Also: Scott Hall, Marlena, Chris Benoit, Gunn & James, Sabu-Sandman.

May 1998: Is The WWF Screwing Another Hart? Also: Steve Austin, Dallas Page, Booker T, Larry Zbyszko, Al Snow.

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July 1998 (Special Issue): Top Stars Answer Your Personal Questions. Also: Jericho-Misterio Jr., Steve Austin, Sunny, Scott Steiner, Christopher-Michinoku.

Aug. 1998: WrestleMania XIV: The *Real* Winners And Losers. Also: Sunny, Curt Hennig, Dan Severn, Ultimo Dragon.

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Jan. 1999: Seasons Greetings With A Bang (DDP & Kimberly). Also: Severn-Shamrock, Konnan, Arn, Undertaker-Kane, Chris Jericho.

Feb. 1999: Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For '99! Also: Hogan & Hart, D-Lo, Ken Shamrock, Slaughter-Snow.

March 1999: Estrange Situation! Insider Reveals: "Shane Still Resents His Father! Also: X-Pac, Hogan-Warrior, Jesse Ventura, Billy Kidman, Scott Norton.

April 1999 (Special Issue): The 1999 INSIDE WRESTLING Computer Tournament. Also: Bossman-McMahon, Steiner & Bischoff, Hollywood Hogan, Wrath, Blue Meanie.

May 1999: Team Corporate's WrestleMania Scare! Mankind's Title Victory Could Have Spoiled Everything! Also: New Age Outlaws, Eddie Guerrero, Triple-H, Bill Goldberg.

June 1999: Still In-Vince-Ible! What Will It Take To Topple This Man? Also: Rey Misterio Jr., ECW, Triple-H, NWO, Blue Meanie.

July 1999 (Special Issue): Top Stars Answer Your Personal Questions. Also: Vince McMahon, Vincent, Eric Bischoff, Giant Baba.

Aug. 1999: WrestleMania XV: The *Real* Winners And Losers! Also: Vam Dam-Lynn, Saturn, Goldust, Steiner-Bagwell.

Sept. 1999: Shane, Come Back! Can Vince Survive Without His Son? Also: Bret Hart, Rick Rude, Ken Shamrock, Hogan-Flair-Page-Goldberg, Tajiri-Crazy.

Oct. 1999 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Mankind & Shamrock, Snow-Holly, Sting, Edge, Flair-Robinson, AIWF.

Nov. 1999: Crash At The Bash! Enter Sid, Viciously! Also: Undertaker-Austin, Acolytes, Master P, Debra, Justin Credible.

Dec. 1999: The Rock: What Makes You Love/Hate This Man? Also: Sting, Shane Douglas, Droz, Piper-Bagwell, Taz.

Holiday 1999 (Special Issue): The 1999 Turnbuckle Turkey Awards. Also: Sting, Dogg-Gunn, Undertaker, Steve Corino, 2000 calendar.

Jan. 2000: Dreaming Of An Extreme Christmas (Tommy Dreamer & Francine). Also: Goldberg, Al Snow, Billy Gunn, Doring & Road Kill, cigar-chompers.

Feb. 2000: Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For 2000! Also: Vince-Bulldog, Mike Awesome, Sid Vicious, Gorilla Monsoon.

March 2000: Kevin Nash & Scott Hall: Getting Inside The Outsiders' Heads. Also: Dudleys, Jerry Lynn, Vince-DX, Kimberly, Zero Gravity.

April 2000 (Special Issue): The Y2K Computer Tournament. Also: Jarrett-PTB, Christopher & Taylor, Lou E. Dangerously, Lawler-Fantastico.

May 2000: Hey, Scott, Watch Your Back! The NWO Is Setting You Up! Also: Hacksaw Duggan, Rikishi Phatu, Test, Mike Awesome.

June 2000: Chris Jericho's Deadliest Enemy: His Ego! Also: Tazz, Kidman-Torrie, Nash-Funk, Buff Bagwell, New Jack.

July 2000 (Special Issue): It's True! Kurt Angle Will Be Hotter Than The Rock In Six Months! Also: Elizabeth, Steve Blackman, Norman Smiley, Spike Dudley, personal questions.

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Jan. 2001: Olympic Games: What Kind Of Angle Has Curt Been Running? Also: Tazz-Lawler, Big Vito, Stacy Keibler, Chris Benoit, Kid Kash, Chyna.

March 2001: Who Knows The Rock's Role? Is He Ditching Wrestling For Hollywood? Also: Trish Stratus, Billy Gunn, Jarrett-Sting, C.W. Anderson, Booker T.

May 2001: The WrestleMania Tip Sheet: What You Must Know About The Event Of The Year! Also: Scott Steiner, Dudleys, Malenko & Lita, Shane Douglas, Raven.

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Oct. 2001: Will Debra Ice Stone-Cold? Also: Vince vs. Shane, Chyna, William Regal, former Big Three stars.

Dec. 2001: The WWF-WCW Dream Matches We Really Want! Also: Tazz, Dudleys, Perry Saturn, Johnny Valentine, 100 WCW facts.

Feb. 2002: RVD: The Story You've Been Missing For 10 Years! Also: Hardys, Randy Orton, Shawn Stasiak, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards.

April 2002: Feud Alert! The Lowdown On 2002's Hotest Showdowns! Also: Rikishi, Stacy Keibler, Shane Helms, 2001 report cards.

June 2002: Special Comeback Issue: Triple-H, Chris Benoit, Kevin Nash. Also: Chris Jericho, Howard Stern, hypothetical unification showdowns.

Aug. 2002: WrestleMania X8: The *Real* Winners And Losers. Also: Hulk Hogan, Scott Steiner, Jamie Noble, Jarrett-Christopher, All-Japan.

Oct. 2002: Dark Side Be Damned! Undertaker's At His Best As Himself! Also: Ric Flair, Triple-H, Wahoo McDaniel, Goldberg, WWE-Hollywood.

Dec. 2002: The Impossible Dream, Part 2: Can Angle Win Another Olympic Gold? Also: Shane McMahon, PTC-WWE, Trish Stratus, Malice, next best things.

Feb. 2003: HBK's Miracle Comeback: Will The Fans Let Him Make The Smart Choice? Also: Edge, RVD, Chuck & Billy, Russ Haas Memorial, Turnbuckle Turkeys.

April 2003: Big Poppa Pump: On A Dirty Mission To Clean Up WWE. Also: Ron Killings, Big Show, WWE agents, report cards.

June 2003: Grabbing For Greatness: Triple-H's Desperate Quest For Immortality. Also: Abdullah, Shawn Michaels, Chris Benoit, WCW winners & losers.

Aug. 2003: WrestleMania XIX: The Supercard That Changed The Course Of History! Also: Rene Dupree, The Hurricane, Chris Jericho, Team Angle, injuries.

Oct. 2003: Done? Don't Count On It! Stone-Cold Will Die If He Can't Fight! Also: Kliq, Miss Elizabeth, D-Lo Brown, FBI, WWE nostalgia.

Dec. 2003: The 10 Most Respectable Wrestlers Who Get No Respect. Also: Dragon vs. Misterio, Hulk Hogan, Lance Storm, Sting, Lawler vs. Rhodes.

Feb. 2004: The Game vs. Da Man: The Death War That's Too Brutal To Last! Also: Undertaker, Kane-Shane, Shaniqua, Briscoes vs. Briscos, Turnbuckle Turkeys.

April 2004: The Raw vs. Smackdown Super Bowl Party: WWE Will Never Be The Same! Also: Tajiri, Maven, Carly Colon, Raw report cards.

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Spotlight Card of the Month

UNIONDALE, NY—*WWE Sunday Night Heat* taping & *Raw* live broadcast at the Nassau Coliseum: **Lance Storm** & **Val Venis** beat **Kevin Fertig** & **Travis Tomko** ... **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** defeated **The Hurricane** & **Rosey** ... **Rob Conway** pinned **Spike Dudley** ... **Rico** pinned **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Scott Steiner** defeated **Steven Richards** ... **Molly Holly** & **Jazz** beat **Trish Stratus** & **Lita** ... **Bill Goldberg** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Batista** pinned **D-Von Dudley** ... **Booker T** beat **Kane** by disqualification ... **Mark Henry** pinned **Chris Jericho** ... Intercontinental champion **Randy Orton** pinned **Rob Van Dam**.
(01-12-04)

UNITED STATES

ARIZONA

GLENDALE—WWE at the Glendale Arena: **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** beat **Paul London** & **Spanky** ... **Ernest Miller** defeated **Jamie Noble** ... **Scotty Too Hotty** pinned **Nunzio** ... **Bradshaw** & **Hardcore Holly** defeated **A-Train** & **Matt Morgan** ... **Chris Benoit** beat **Chuck Palumbo** ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** defeated **Billy Kidman** and **Tajiri** in a three-way match ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** and **Akio** & **Sakoda** in an elimination match ... **Dawn Marie** beat **Sable** and **Nidia** in a tiny teddy contest ... U.S. champion **The Big Show** defeated **John Cena**.
(01-03-04)

—Wanda L. Page

PHOENIX —Impact Zone Wrestling at Pitic Bar & Lounge: **Nemisis** defeated **Monster Mayhem** ... **Arachnidman** beat **Rouge Roberts** ... **Navajo Warrior** & **Sarah Del Ray** defeated **The Ooshaa Brothers** ... **Jack Durango** defeated **G.Q. Gallo** in a lumberjack match ... Heavyweight champ **Hawaiian Lion** beat **Chris Kole** ... **Clay Dayson** beat **Countdown** ... **Chris Kole** & **Ryan Drago** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Jack Durango** defeated **Fireball** ... Tag team champs **G.Q. Gallo** & **J.C. Williams** beat **Derek Neikirk** & **Mike Knox**.
(12-23-03)

—Mary Kroger

ARKANSAS

DELAPLAINE—American Championship Wrestling Entertainment at the High School Gym: **Scott Fury** beat **Johnny Harper** by disqualification ... Tag team champs **New Breed** pinned **Freezer Thompson** & **Enforcer** ... **Team Old School** defeated **Chuck Daddy**, **Idol Bane**, & **Kris Kaos** ... Light heavyweight champ **Ray Ray** won a three-way ladder match against **Kid Krazy** and **C.J. Awake** ... **Cujo** defeated **Jeremy James** to win the heavyweight championship ... **Heartbreaker** pinned **Austin Lane**.
(12-27-03)

—Bryan Underwood

FORTVILLE—Big River Wrestling at the Boys' & Girls' Club: ***Tournament to declare a new heavyweight champion, quarterfinals:*** **Billy Maverick** beat **Craven Morehead** by submission ... **M.C. Bob** beat **Mike Arkansas** by countout ... **Joe Winston** pinned **The Mailman** ... **Eric Draven** pinned **McRoberts** ... ***Semifinals:*** Maverick beat M.C. Bob by knockout ... Draven beat Winston by submission ... ***Finals:*** Draven pinned Maverick to become the first Big River Wrestling champion.
(12-17-03)

—Robert Cromins

NEWPORT—American Championship Wrestling Entertainment at the National Guard Armory: **Ray Ray** defeated **Chuck Daddy**, **C.J. Awake**, and **Shorty** in a four-way match ... **Enforcer** defeated **Cody Daniels** & **Idol Bane** in a hardcore handicap match ... **Team Old School** beat **Morgan Lane**, **X-Kaliber**, & **P-Ray**... **Cujo** beat heavyweight champion **Jeremy James** by disqualification ... **Austin Lane** & **Deadly Dale** pinned tag champs **Scott Fury** & **Kid Krazy** to win the belts.
(12-13-03)

—Bryan Underwood

CALIFORNIA

FRESNO—WWE at the Save Mart Center: Raw tag team champions **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** beat **Christian** & **Chris Jericho** in a table match ... **John Heidenreich** defeated **Nick Dinsmore** ... **Steven Richards** pinned **Rico** ... **Shawn Michaels** defeated **Batista** ... **Mark Henry** pinned **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Lance Storm** & **Val Venis** beat **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** ... **Randy Orton** defeated **Maven** ... **The Hurricane** & **Lita** beat **Matt Hardy** & **Molly Holly** (**Jazz** was the guest referee) ... Intercontinental champion **Rob Van Dam** beat **Kane** by disqualification.
(12-07-03)

—Scott Remmington

COLORADO

LOVELAND—WWE at the Budweiser Center: Raw tag team champions **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** beat **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** ... **John Heidenreich** beat **Nick Dinsmore** ... **Steven Richards** defeated **Rico** ... **Lance Storm** & **Val Venis**

Spike Dudley tried to take the slow, methodical approach to his match with Rob Conway, working basic holds like side headlocks early. It didn't work for long. Conway eventually won with a slingshot suplex.

beat **Christian** & **Test** ... **Maven** defeated **Mark Henry** ... Intercontinental champion **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Randy Orton** ... **The Hurricane** & **Lita** defeated **Matt Hardy** & **Molly Holly** ... **Kane** pinned **Batista**.
(12-06-03)

—Jen Russell

FLORIDA

BOCA RATON—Maximum Pro Wrestling at the FAU Live Oak Pavilion: **Bruno Sassi** beat **Anthony Michaels** ... **Sean Allen** beat **Chasyn Rance** ... **Antonio Banks** beat **Lex Lovett** ... **Scoot Andrews** beat **Steve Madison** ... **Market Crashers** beat **Axis** & **Python** ... **Chaz** beat **Chris Candido** ... **Warlord** beat **Punisher** ... **Hack Myers** beat **Casey Thompson** & **Dave Johnson**.
(12-19-03)

—Misha Williams

ST. PETERSBURG—NWA Florida at the Arena: **Mikey Batts** & **Eric Stevens** defeated **Mikey Tenderfoot** & **Rod Steel** ... **Danny Doring** beat **Sedrick Strong** ... **O.G. Scarface** wrestled **Chaos** to a no-contest in a hardcore match ... **Billy Fives** defeated **David Babylon** ... **Frankie Capone** won a bunkhouse battle royal ... Tag team champions **The Shane Brothers** beat **Lex Lovett** & **Antonio Banks** ... **Cuban Assassin** & **Navy Seal** beat **Mike Sullivan** & **Bruce Steele** ... **Jerelle Clark** won a four-way dance against **Justice**, **Naphtali**, and X champion **Roderick Strong** to win the title ... Heavyweight champ **Steve Madison** beat **Scoot Andrews** in a no-disqualification match.
(12-13-03)

—Shannon Rose

WEST PALM BEACH—WWE at the South Florida Expo Center: **Matt Hardy** defeated **Maven** ... **Rosey** defeated **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Test** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Booker T** beat **Mark Henry** ... **Lance Storm** & **Val Venis** beat **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** ... Women's champion **Molly Holly** beat **Lita**, **Trish Stratus**, and **Jazz** in a four-way match (**Victoria** was the guest referee) ... Intercontinental champion **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Randy Orton** ... **Kane** defeated **Batista** ... Raw tag team champions **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** defeated **Chris Jericho** & **Christian**.
(12-13-03)

—Duane Long

GEORGIA

CORNELIA—NWA Wildside at the NWA Arena: **C.J. McManus** beat **Billy McNeil** ... **Fast Eddie** won the junior heavyweight title in an eight-man gauntlet match ... **Caprice Coleman** beat **Rainman** by disqualification ... **Jimmy Rave** & **Caprice Coleman** beat **Jason Cross** & **Azrael** ... **Murder One** & **Slim J** wrestled **Nemesis** & **Shadow Jackson** to a no-contest ... **Tank** beat **Bulldog Raines** by disqualification in a dog-collar match ... **David Young** beat **Cru Jones** ... **Masada** & **Todd Sexton** beat **Jeremy V** & **Brandon P** to win the tag team title ... **Gabriel** & **Altar Boy Luke** wrestled **Azrael** & **Slash** to a draw in a table match ... **Iceberg** & **Onyx** beat **Hotstuff Hernandez** & **Mikal Adryan**.
(12-26-03)

—Larry Goodman

DALTON—TWA at the TWA Arena: **Quaz** defeated **J.L. Cool** in a bra and panties match ... **Skull** beat **Drake** ... **Hot Rod Roberts** & **Ray Fury** beat **Ben the Machine** & **David Idol** ... **Dino Dupree** beat **Chucky Chuck** by disqualification ... **Ben Thrasher** beat **Jason Hampton** ... Action Zone champion **Cody Gunn** beat **Blazing Fury** ... **Dino Dupree** & **Shawn Shady** beat **The Nutty Buddies** ... **Frankie Frank** & **Risk Taylor** beat **Scott Bear** & **Sarge** ... **Rick Justice** & **Quaz** beat **Bobby Hayes** & **Big Wood**.
(12-25-03)

—Henry Kilker

Talk about your clash of styles. It was the flamboyance of Rico vs. the hardcore toughness and grit of Tommy Dreamer. Flamboyance won out this time.

HARTWELL—IWA at the Middle School: Tag team champions **Dale Dwindle** & **Lance Christopher** defeated **Logan Kincayde** & **Derrick Ravage** ... **James Boulevard** defeated **The Tower** by countout ... **The Corpse** defeated **J.T. Justice** ... **Executioner** beat **Big Country** ... **Phillip Pain**, **Tow Truck**, & **Ricky Cobb** defeated **Billy Starr**, **Panhead Nelson**, & **Tommy Sawyer** ... Heavyweight champion **Rahn Jordan** defeated **Don Matthews**.
(12-20-03)

—Dave Busch

ROME—New Age Wrestling Alliance at Dillard's Music Park: **Shaun Tempers** defeated **Loon-A-Tic** ... **The Alpha Omega Franchise** defeated **The New Legacy** ... NWA Southwest tag team champions **Hallowmass** defeated **HCP** ... Junior heavyweight champion **Justin Ramey** defeated **Chit Martinez** and **D.L. Norris** in a three-way match ... **Crazy Francis** beat **Ace Rockwell** ... TV champion **Nick Rampage** defeated **Rick Michaels**.
(12-20-03)

—Genia Bennett

MILLEDGEVILLE—GIWA's "Christmas Carnage" at the Armory: **Mac Davis** beat **Dragon Del Fuego** ... **Damian Dread** beat **Anthony Henry** ... **Sean Logan** & **The Professor** beat **Firewalker** & **Lance Christian** ... **Dan Ivey** beat **Bobby Blaze** in a hardcore match ... **Mike Stratus** defeated **G-No** ... Midstate champion **The Freak** beat **Oko Nono** ... Heavyweight champion **A.J. Steele** beat **Preston Paradise** in a no-disqualification match.
(12-13-03)

—Anthony Hall

ILLINOIS

ELK GROVE—Pro Championship Wrestling at the PCW Arena: **Chase Richards** defeated **James Thornhill** ... Women's champion **Super J** beat **Sensational Sasha** ... **Mike Horning** defeated **P.J. Benton** to win the cruiserweight title ... **The Butcher** wrestled to a double-countout with **Rick Rocket** ... **P.J. Benton** beat **Chris Styles** to win the Midwest title ... **Sacrifice** beat **Warm Carlos** ... **Mal Fuego Roacho** & **Tony Rican** beat **The Gravediggers**, **Southern Comfort**, and **The Chicago Connection** in a four-way elimination match to win the tag team title.
(12-27-03)

—Michelle & Rachel Nixon

CHICAGO—WWE at Allstate Arena: Cruiserweight champion **Tajiri** beat **Billy Kidman** ... **Chuck Palumbo** defeated **Horshu** ... **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** beat **Paul London** & **Spanky** ... **Orlando Jordan** pinned **Johnny Stamboli** ... **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** beat **Akio** & **Sakoda** ... **Hardcore Holly** pinned **Rhyno** ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Dawn Marie**, **Nidia**, and **Sable** in a tiny teddy contest ... **Chris Benoit**, **John Cena**, & **Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **The Big Show**, **Brock Lesnar**, & **Matt Morgan**.
(12-13-03)

—Steve Drew

PEORIA—Next Generation Wrestling at the Athletic Club: **Apocalypse** beat **Scott Keyes** ... **Deacon Hobbs** beat **Shane Griffin** ... **Kody Kash** & **Johnny Justice** beat **M.C. Trip C** & **Ryan Phoenix** ... Heavyweight champion **Justin MacIntyre** beat **Chris Brown** ... **Scott Keyes**, **Jester**, **M.C. Trip C**, **Ryan Phoenix**, & **Chris Brown** beat **Apocalypse**, **Deacon Hobbs**, **Kody Kash**, **Johnny Justice**, & **Justin MacIntyre**.
(12-13-03)

—Tyler Purcell

SPRINGFIELD—New Midwest Wrestling at the Sports Center: **Dredd Walker** won $1,000 in a naughty-or-nice gift box match over **New World Quinten**, **Doug Fraze**, **Shane Matthews**, and **J.J.**

Test has really struggled of late against new fan favorite Steven Richards. But Test's tag team partner, Scott Steiner, had Richards on the defensive all match long and grabbed a fairly easy win.

Tank ... **El Diablo Silverado** & **Eric Logan** defeated tag team champs **Steven Bishop** & **Jakob** in a non-title match. ... **Dick Moore** pinned **El Pollo Loco** ... **Bradley Stephens** pinned **Hardcore K.C.** ... **Toga Steve** & **Matt Boston** beat **Red** & **Coop** ... **Scotty Cash** & **Benz** beat **Stan Sallinger** & **Earl Grissom** ... **Guy Smith** pinned **Jason Wells** ... **Tom Arson** pinned **Sage Ramsey**.
(12-13-03)

—Donna D'Amato

MARSEILLES—Powerhouse Wrestling Inc. at the Grade School: **Jeff King** pinned **Frankie the Face** ... **Dr. Timothy Lyle** pinned **Homie** ... **Jackknife** pinned **Dimension** ... **Jimmy Shalwin** defeated heavyweight champion **Matt Maverick** by countout ... **Josh Abercrombie** pinned **Azul Dragon** ... **Storm Rider** pinned **Freight Train Smith** ... **Matt Maverick** & **The Honky Tonk Man** defeated **Jimmy Shalwin** & **Magnum Conroy** by disqualification.
(12-06-03)

—Tobi Hope

INDIANA

HANOVER—Supreme Championship Wrestling at the Jefferson County 4-H Fairgrounds: **Brandon Hunter** beat **The Young Rebel** and **Black Rain** in a three-way dance ... **Major Hazard** defeated **El Guapo 2X** in a first-blood match ...Tag team champions **ESP** defeated **Area 51** & **Lurch** ... **Buck Nekked** pinned **Sam Hanson** ... Hardcore champion **Mason the Mangler** wrestled **Phobia** to a no-contest ... **Stacy Starr** defeated **Helen Wheels** ... **Billy Maverick** defeated **Eric Draven** in a steel cage match.
(12-23-03)

—Tonia Wallace

HOLTON—American Wrestling Alliance at the Holton Gym: **Eric Draven** beat **Big Mike D** by disqualification ... **Malachi** (with one arm tied behind his back) beat **Tsunami** & **Donnie Angel** in a handicap match ... **Mason the Mangler** and **Spazz** wrestled to a time-limit draw ... **Roger Blade** pinned **Brandon Hunter** ... **Chris Rave** & **Damien Morrus** beat **The Dysfunctional Family** ... **Roger Blade** won a battle royal ... **Chuck McRoberts** beat heavyweight champion **Prophet** ... **Billy Maverick** beat **The Rebel** in a Texas death match.
(12-14-03)

—Allan Primer

INDIANAPOLIS—WWE at Conseco Fieldhouse: Cruiserweight champion **Tajiri** pinned **Billy Kidman** ... **Chuck Palumbo** pinned **Horshu** ... **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** beat **Paul London** & **Spanky** ... **Orlando Jordan** pinned **Johnny Stamboli** ... **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** defeated **Akio** & **Sakoda** ... **Hardcore Holly** defeated **Rhyno** ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** beat **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Dawn Marie**, **Sable**, and **Nidia** in a tiny teddy contest ... **Chris Benoit**, **John Cena**, & **Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **The Big Show**, **Brock Lesnar**, & **Matt Morgan**.
(12-14-03)

—Dutch Krewda

IOWA

FAIRFIELD—Body Slam Wrestling Association at Saint Andrew's Hall: **Mike Winter** beat **Brian Beach** ... **Cuzn It** wrestled **U.R. Dumm** to a no-contest ... **Infectious Diseases** defeated **The Greens** ... **Billy Maverick** defeated **Black Death** ... **Eric Draven** beat **Jake Davis** ... **Cody Adams**, **Slugger Boone**, & **Da Bomb** beat **Tommy 2-Face**, **Crazy Carl**, & **Plain Old Benny**.
(12-30-03)

—Kristy Bailey

KENTUCKY

GEORGETOWN—Prime Time Wrestling at the Convention Center: **Ice Train** pinned **Al Steele** ... **Showboat** defeated **Syxxe** and **Brian Williamson** in a three-way match ... **Billy Maverick** pinned **Scott Hayes** ... **Justin Idol** beat **Ray Steele** by disqualification ... **Bo Johnson** & **Jason Cross** defeated **Kid Homicide** & **Cujo** ... **Larry D** beat U.S. champion **Michael Payne** in a best-of-three-falls match to win the title.
(12-28-03)

—Thomas Preston

CENTRAL CITY—Bad 2 The Bone Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Billy Black** pinned **Ring Crew Rob** ... **Simon Sezz** defeated **All Star** by submission ... **Randy Royal** wrestled to a double-disqualification with **Crusher Bonz** ... **Big Bubba** defeated **Jason Pennington** ... Heavyweight champion **Vic the Bruiser** beat **Appolo** & **Dub C** in a best-of-three-falls handicap match.
(12-27-03)

—Joe Bailey

CENTRAL CITY—Bad 2 The Bone Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Simon Sezz** pinned **Jason Pennington** ... **Ring Crew Rob** beat **Dasia Cain** by disqualification ... **Big Bubba** pinned **Billy Black** ... **Crusher Bonz** pinned **Mr. Showtime** ... **Billy Black**, **J.C. Bailey**, & **Crusher Bonz** defeated **Simon Sezz**, **Dub C**, & **Big Bubba** by disqualification.
(12-13-03)

—Joe Bailey

HARRODSBURG—Central Wrestling Alliance at the National Guard Armory: **Redneck Superstar** beat **Kid Flash** ... **Seduction** beat **Cherry** by reverse decision ... **Mongoose** defeated **The Mighty Cujo** by countout ...**Terry Alan** & **Rick Morton** beat **Jad T. Lungini** & **Maddawg** ... **J.T. Money** won a 16-man battle royal.
(12-23-03)

—Frank Miller

LOYALL—Premier Championship Wrestling at the High School: **Tony Glory** defeated **Ryan Dookie** ... **Spike Rogers** beat **Brian Overbay** ... **Billy Maverick** defeated **Kimo Phatu** and **Scott Adams** in a three-way dance ... **Drake Barr** defeated **Danaconda** in a leather strap match ... **Overkill** defeated hardcore champ **Chris Taylor** to regain the title ... **Mike Stone** defeated **The Regulator** in a staple gun-on-a-pole match ... Tag team champions **Ripp** & **Rage** defeated **Booger Lee** & **Charley Brown**.
(12-15-03)

—James Collins

LOUISIANA

HAYNESVILLE—American Championship Wrestling at the High School: **Scott Murdoch** defeated **Masked Italiano** ... **Darin Childs** pinned **Enigma** ... **Mace** defeated **Wes Word** ... **Matt Longtime** beat **Slam Shady** ... **Jeremy Young** & **Steve Williams** defeated **Glenn Gilberti** & **Alex Porteau**.
(12-13-03)

—Travis McKeon

MASSACHUSETTS

SOUTHBRIDGE—Eastern Wrestling Alliance at the Knights of Columbus: **Kenn Phoenix** beat **Johnny Curtis** ... **Brian Roselli**, **Sonny Roselli**, **Robbie Ellis**, & **Larry Huntley** beat **Andre Lyonz**, **Jim Nastic**, **Paul Hudson**, **Danny the Bull**, **Ring Crew Kid Dan**, & **Evil Nick** in a handicap elimination match ... **Chi Chi Cruz** pinned **Adam Booker** to win the New England title ... **Vince Vicallo** won a fatal four-way match against **Cueball**, **Arch Kinkaid**, and **Todd Hansen** ... **Johnny Heartbreaker** & **Kid Krazy** beat **Brian Black** & **Mini** ... Heavyweight champion **Maverick Wild** beat **Luis Ortiz**.
(12-13-03)

—Kevin McPherson

METHUEN—Chaotic Wrestling at the Knights of Columbus Hall: **Handsome Johnny** & **Psycho** defeated **Dr. Reginald Heresy** & **Andre Lyonz** ... **Vince Vicallo** defeated **Bill Logan** ... **Adam Booker** defeated **Maverick Wild** ... **Brian Buffet** & **Peter Mulloy** defeated tag team champions **Brian Black** & **The Mighty Mini** to win the title ... New England champion **Arch Kincaid** pinned **Kenn Phoenix** ... **John Walters** wrestled **Luis Ortiz** to a 30-minute time-limit draw.
(12-05-03)

—Rich Palladino

MINNESOTA

MAPLE GROVE—Midwest Pro Wrestling at the MPW Arena: **El Viejo** pinned **Shawn Daivari** ... **Brady A. Dezire** beat **Joessiah** ... **Josie** & **Pretty Boy Delgado** defeated **Ms. Natural** & **Mason Quinn** ... **Kid Krazy** won the cruiserweight title by beating **Casanova** in a title vs. hair match ... **Cody O'Neil** pinned **Ben Sailer** ... **ODB** defeated **Tracy Brooks** ... **Arik Cannon** and **Shifty** wrestled to a draw in a TLC match, as both wrestlers got part of a contract that was suspended above the ring.
(12-27-03)

—Wayne McCarty

MINNEAPOLIS—Coast to Coast Wrestling Alliance at First Avenue: **Midwest Shockers** beat **John Johnson** & **Shimdog** ... Heavyweight champion **Black Stallion** pinned **Dick Dragon** ... **Austin Aries** defeated **Arik Cannon** ... **Josie** pinned **Ms. Natural** ... **Lenny Lane** beat **Mason Quinn** ... **Shawn Daivari** & **ODB** defeated **Ken Anderson** & **Tracy Brooks**.
(12-23-03)

—Wayne McCarty

MICHIGAN

SAGINAW—WWE at Wendler Arena: **Ultimo Dragon** beat **Nunzio** ... **Akio** & **Sakoda** defeated **Paul London** & **Spanky** ... **Billy Kidman** pinned **Ernest "The Cat" Miller** ... **Bradshaw** & **Hardcore Holly** beat **Matt Morgan** & **Rhyno** ... **John Cena** pinned **Sean O'Haire** ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** beat **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** and **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** in a three-way elimination match ... **Chris Benoit** defeated **Chuck Palumbo** in a submission match ... **Dawn Marie** beat **Sable** in a tiny teddy contest ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** defeated **A-Train**, **Tajiri**, and **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in a four-way match (**Kurt Angle** was the guest referee).
(01-12-04)

—Anthony Fletcher

CADILLAC—WWE at the Wexford County Civic Center: **Ultimo Dragon** defeated **Nunzio** ... **Bradshaw** & **Hardcore Holly** beat **Matt Morgan** & **Rhyno** ... **John Cena** pinned **Sean O'Haire** ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** beat **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** and **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** in a three-way elimination match ... **Billy Kidman** defeated **Ernest "The Cat" Miller** ... **Paul London** & **Spanky** beat **Akio** & **Sakoda** ... **Chris Benoit** beat **Chuck Palumbo** in a submission match ... **Dawn Marie** defeated **Sable** in a lingerie contest ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **A-Train**, **Chavo Guerrero Jr.**, and **Tajiri** in a four-way elimination match (**Kurt Angle** was the guest referee).
(01-11-04)

—Harry Burkett

KALAMAZOO—WWE at Wings Stadium: **Ultimo Dragon** defeated **Nunzio** ... **Bradshaw** & **Hardcore Holly** defeated **Matt Morgan** & **Rhyno** ... **John Cena** pinned **Sean O'Haire** ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** and **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** in a three-way match ... **Akio** & **Sakoda** beat **Paul London** & **Spanky** ... **Chris Benoit** beat **Chuck Palumbo** in a submission match ... **Dawn Marie** defeated **Sable** in a lingerie contest ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** defeated **A-Train**, **Tajiri**, and **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in a four-way match (**Kurt Angle** was the guest referee).
(01-10-04)

—Douglas Law

JACKSON—All World Wrestling League at the Roberts Arena: **Truth Martini** defeated **Gutter** ... **Stryc-9** & **Miss Olympia** defeated **The Great Mongo** & **Shauna Doyle** ... **Julian the Warlock** defeated **Soulman Carter** ... **Gorilla Barone** beat **Mahoney** ... **Big Jake** defeated **The Milwaukee Crusher** by disqualification in a strap match ... **The Hollywood Hustlers** beat **Curtis Martin** & **Robbie McAllister** ... **Sabu** defeated **Mr. Hughes**.
(12-13-03)

—Aaron McMann

MISSISSIPPI

TUPELO—WWE at the BancorpSouth Center: **Spike Dudley**, **Lance Storm**, & **Val Venis** defeated **Christian**, **Scott Steiner**, & **Test** ... **Steven Richards** pinned **John Heidenreich** ... **Matt Cappotelli** defeated **Rene Dupree** ... Women's champion **Molly Holly** beat **Trish Stratus**, **Lita**, and **Jazz** in a four-way elimination match ... **Mark Henry** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Rob Conway** defeated **John Hennigan** ... Raw tag team champions **Batista** & **Ric Flair** beat **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** and **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** in a three-way elimination match ... **Kane** defeated **Chris Jericho** by disqualification ... Intercontinental champion **Randy Orton** beat **Rob Van Dam**.
(01-04-04)

—Liz Hunter

JACKSON—WWE at the Mississippi Coliseum: Intercontinental champion **Randy Orton** defeated **Rob Van Dam** ... **Steven Richards** pinned **John Heidenreich** ... **Rene Dupree** defeated **Matt Cappotelli** ... **Spike Dudley**, **Lance Storm**, & **Val Venis** beat **Christian**, **Test**, & **Scott Steiner** ... **Mark Henry** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Rob Conway** beat **John Hennigan** ... Women's champion **Molly Holly** defeated **Jazz**, **Trish Stratus**, and **Lita** in a four-way elimination match ... Raw tag team champions **Batista** & **Ric Flair** beat **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** and **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** in a three-way elimination match ... **Kane** pinned **Chris Jericho**.
(01-03-04)

—Paul Dernwood

BRANDON—Family Friendly Wrestling at the Gemini Gymnastics Center: **Billy Maverick** & **Eric Draven** defeated **The Freedom Fighters** ... **Strange Lee Handsome** beat **Box Car Bob** ... **Havoc** pinned **The Mimic** ... **Open All Night** beat **The Strattons** ... **Poison Arrow** defeated **Lovely Lexis** ... **Scorpio** beat **P.T. Benson** and **Rusty Nail** in a three-way dance ... **John Sharp** defeated **Brian Blair Jr.**
(12-22-03)

—Victor Welch

MONTANA

BILLINGS—WWE at Metrapark: Raw tag team champions **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** defeated **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** ... **John Heidenreich** beat **Nick Dinsmore** ... **Mark Henry** defeated **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Steven Richards**

Trish Stratus took out both her opponents at once during one memorable sequence of this match. But Jazz and Molly Holly regained their bearings and got the best of Trish and Lita in the end.

Matt Hardy probably regretted speaking out about having no viable Raw opponents to challenge him after he was steamrolled by Goldberg.

pinned **Rico** ... **Christian** & **Test** defeated **Lance Storm** & **Val Venis** ... **Randy Orton** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Matt Hardy** & **Lita** defeated **Molly Holly** & **Jazz** after **The Hurricane** interfered ... **Kane** defeated **Batista**.
(12-05-03)

—Bob Randall

NEW JERSEY

WEST PATERSON—Independent Wrestling Federation's fourth annual Tournament of Champions at the IWF Center (day two): ***Semifinals:*** **Fred Sampson** defeated **Shane O'Brien** ... **Kevin Knight** defeated **Travis Blake** ... **Roman** defeated **Dan McGuire** ... **Brandon Young** beat **Shawn Donavan** ... ***Final:*** Roman defeated Sampson, Knight, and Young in a four-way elimination match to win the tournament ... ***In non-tournament matches:*** **Aaron Stride** defeated **Vik Voorhees** ... **Jay Blaze** & **Sean Royal** defeated **Tony Torres** & **Chris Steeler**.
(12-28-03)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

WEST PATERSON—Independent Wrestling Federation's fourth annual Tournament of Champions at the IWF Center (day one): ***Quarterfinals:*** **Travis Blake** defeated **Tony Torres** ... **Shawn Donavan** defeated **Jay Blaze** ... **Brandon Young** defeated **Vik Voorhees** ... **Shane O'Brien** defeated **Aaron Stride** ... **Fred Sampson** beat **C.J. Summers** ... **Kevin Knight** defeated **Sean Royal** ... **Dan McGuire** defeated **Tommy Trouble** ... **Roman** defeated **Eloy Fiesta.**
(12-27-03)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

PERTH AMBOY—National Wrestling Superstars at the Delaney Recreation Center: **J.T. Highlander** & **Jerry Doring** beat **The Next Generation** ... **TNT** beat regional heavyweight champion **Biggie Biggs** to win the title ... **The Enforcer** pinned **Slayer** ... **Rob Eckos** beat junior heavyweight champ **Mike Kruel** to win the title ... **Tommy Force** beat **Antonio Malave** and **Archadia** in a three-way match ... **The Patriot** & **Doink** defeated **The Baghdad Bullies**.
(12-27-03)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

NEW MEXICO

ALBUQUERQUE—WWE at the Tingley Coliseum: **Scotty Too Hotty** pinned **Nunzio** ... **Jamie Noble** pinned **Ernest Miller** ... **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** beat **Paul London** & **Spanky** ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** defeated **Billy Kidman** and **Tajiri** in a three-way match ... **Bradshaw** & **Hardcore Holly** beat **A-Train** & **Matt Morgan** ... **Chris Benoit** beat **Chuck Palumbo** in a submission match ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** and **Akio** & **Sakoda** in a three-way elimination match ... **Dawn Marie** beat **Sable** and **Nidia** in a tiny teddy contest ... U.S. champion **The Big Show** pinned **John Cena**.
(01-04-04)

—Steve Drew

NEW YORK

ROCHESTER—Rochester Pro Wrestling at the Kayfabe Dojo: **Colin Olsen** won a $20,000 battle royal ... **Osawa Syndicate** wrestled **Amazing Technicolor Dreamboats** to a draw ... **Nick Paradise** won a three-way dance against **Bobby Shields** and **Fusion** ... **Steve Kruz** defeated **Sweet Lou** ... **Big 'n' Tasty** beat **Saint** & **Sanchez** ... **Thrills** & **Chills** defeated **Colin Olsen** & **I.B. Green** ... **Evan McCloud** defeated **Mike Akita** ... **Kevin Dunn** (not the WWE TV producer) beat **Charisma** in a last-man-standing match ... Heavyweight champion **Kid Justice** defeated **Mean Marcos**.
(12-13-03)

—Rob Cook

NEW YORK—WWE at Madison Square Garden: **The Hurricane** defeated **Test** ... **Mark Henry** beat **Tommy Dreamer** ... Women's champion **Molly Holly** defeated **Lita**, **Jazz**, and **Trish Stratus** in an elimination match (**Victoria** was the guest referee) ... **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** defeated **Lance Storm** & **Val Venis** ... **Matt Hardy** defeated **Maven** ... Raw tag team champions **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** beat **Chris Jericho** & **Christian** in a table match ... **Shawn Michaels** beat **Ric Flair** ... **Booker T** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **Batista** & **Randy Orton** ... Raw champion **Bill Goldberg** pinned **Kane**.
(12-12-03)

—Dominick Valenti

NORTH CAROLINA

BURLINGTON—CWF Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling at the Carolina Sports Arena: **Joey Silvia** defeated **Alex Stone** ... **Wild-Eyed Southern Boys** defeated **Rob McBride** & **Dexter Poindexter** ... **Sean Powers** & **Mitch Norris** defeated **The SouthSide Playas** ... **Krazy K** defeated **Kamakazi Kid** to win the Rising Generation League title ... **The Crew** defeated **Xsiris** & **Trent Wylde** ... **Gemini Kid** & **Mikael Yamaha** defeated tag team champions **The Brads** to win the title ... **Ric Converse** defeated heavyweight champion **Corey Edsel** to win the title.
(12-27-03)

—Tara Rheaume

ROCKINGHAM—World Class Extreme Wrestling at the Richmond County Rescue Squad Building: **Indian Outlaw** pinned **Deacon** ... New class champ **Steve Michaels** pinned **Indian Outlaw** ... **Tyrone Knox** pinned **Hangtime** after **Ouga Bouga** interfered ... Hardcore champ **Justin Feechie** beat **Aaron Devil** in a ambulance match ... Heavyweight champ **The Stro** pinned **Ouga Bouga** ... **Aaron Devil** won a battle royal.
(12-20-03)

—Texas Patton

WILLIAMSTON—Coastal Real Extreme Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: Lightweight champ **Brandon Day** beat **Chris Escobar** ... ***In a gauntlet match series:*** **John Thundercloud** beat **Damien Wyld** ... Thundercloud beat **Pat Anderson** ... **Vax** beat Thundercloud ... Vax beat **Bobby Austin** ... **Vinnie Vain** beat Vax ... **Justin Feechie** beat Vain ... **Adrian Whisper** beat Feechie in the final match to become the new extreme champion ... **Steffi** beat **Eva Destruction** ...Tag team champs **Spank** & **Chris Escobar** beat **Justin Feechie** & **Ouga Bouga** ... **The Stro** beat **Gluteus Maximus** ... Heavyweight champion **Timber** beat **Barbarian** by reverse decision.
(12-13-03)

—John Medlin

OHIO

EASTLAKE—New Era Pro Wrestling at Sneakee Pete's Bar and Grille: **Aero** beat **Gran Futura** ... **The Bouncer** & **Tuff Tina** beat **Christian Faith** & **Shawn Blaze** ... **Tony Galloway** beat **Aaron Andrews** ... **Blackhammer** beat **Shawn Anthony** ...

Carlton Kaz beat **The Deviant** ... **Adam Cage** & **DisCole Fever** beat **Extreme Violence** ... **J-Rocc** beat **Kid Bielik**.
(12-29-03)

—Janice Markley

OBERLIN—Power Championship Wrestling at the Boys' & Girls' Club: **Brandon Hunter** pinned **Holden Yurin** ... **Dixie Cupps** defeated **Rosie Palmer** ... **Mason the Mangler** beat **Phobia** in a streetfight ... **Tyler Jacobs** beat **Senior Cooter** ... **Billy Maverick** & **Eric Draven** beat **Ripp** & **Gripp** ... **Seattle Slew** beat **Andy Muscat** by disqualification ... **Quinten Towne** beat **Dark Star** in a ladder match.
(12-27-03)

—Terrance Allen

CLEVELAND—Cleveland All Pro Wrestling at Jimmy's in the Flats: **Nick Ritters** beat **Shawn Blaze** ... **Nikita Allanov** beat **Daron Smythe** ... **Canadian Bad Boy** beat **Immaculate JDB** ... **Aero** beat **Brandon X** ... **Tyson Bishop** and **Dios Salvador** wrestled to a 30-minute draw... **Sheik Abdul Hassan** beat **Johnny Blaze** ... **The Bouncer** beat **Christian Faith** ... **Ray Right** beat **The Basket Nazi** ... TV champ **Jason Bane** beat **Adam Cage**.
(12-12-03)

—Gregg Johnson

ELYRIA—Power Championship Wrestling at the High School: **Brandon Hunter** pinned **Ben Loddin** ... **Billy Maverick** defeated **Eternal Nightmare** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **Dark Star** beat **Tommy Green** ... **The Super Clowns** beat **Foolish Pleasure** by disqualification ... **Eric Draven** beat **Andy Muscat** by submission ... **Quinten Towne** beat **Phobia** in a weapons match.
(12-12-03)

—Terrance Allen

OKLAHOMA

TULSA—Steel Rage Pro Wrestling at Mickey's: **The Enforcer** defeated **Brutus Maximus** ... Hardcore champion **John O'Malley** defeated **Harry Sanchez** ... **Renegade** defeated **Mike 2000** ... **Trey Christian** & **X-Cal** beat **El Guapo Loco** & **Anarchy** ... **Luc Lapointe** & **Dexter Hardaway** defeated **Brigg** & **Bobbie Brodi** ... **The Great Bolo** & **Cole Crittenden** beat **Northern Threat**.
(12-20-03)

—Ken Windwalker

TULSA—Steel Rage Pro Wrestling at Mickey's: **Brutus Maximus** defeated **Trey Christian** ... ***Light heavyweight gauntlet series:*** **Cade Sydal** beat **Devon Monroe** ... **El Guapo Loco** defeated Sydal ... **X-Cal** beat El Guapo Loco ... X-Cal defeated **Dexter Hardaway** ... X-Cal defeated light heavyweight champ **Anarchy** to win the title and the gauntlet ... **Leather** defeated women's champ **Ares** to win the belt ... Hardcore champ **John O'Malley** defeated **Luc Lapointe** ... Heavyweight champ **Brandon Groom** defeated **Slater Vain**.
(12-13-03)

—Ken Windwalker

OREGON

PORTLAND—Portland Wrestling at the Kliever Armory: **Damon Scythe** beat **Matt Farmer** ... **Skag Rollins** beat **The Grappler** ... **Tony Kozina** beat **Bryan Alvarez** ... **Black Dragon** beat **Robby Lance** ... **Scotty Mac** defeated **Vance Nevada** ... **Dustin Snyder** & **Robby Lance** defeated **Dante** & **Damon Scythe** ... **Scotty Mac** defeated **Skag Rollins**.
(12-27-03)

—Bob Vance

PENNSYLVANIA

HANOVER—Ground Breaking Wrestling at the 34 Broadway Ballroom: **Core** pinned **Ryan Phenix** ... **Ishmel** beat **Ian Cross** ... **Ronald Wake** won a triple threat match against **Jason Maximum** and **Danny Rage** ... **Blaine Barret** beat **Apollo Cruz** ... **Mr. Excellent** beat **Scott Richards** ... **Braydon Shockker** beat **Simon Ryme** ... Breaker champion **Buster Macabbi** defeated **J.T. Roberts** ... Heavyweight champion **Travis D** defeated **Quinn Nash**.
(12-27-03)

—Chris Miller

HANOVER—Ground Breaking Wrestling at the 34 Broadway Ballroom: **Buster Macabbi** & **Blaine Barret** were co-winners of an eight-man rumble ... ***Heavyweight title tournament, quarterfinals:*** **Travis D** pinned **J.T. Roberts** ... **Braydon Shockker** pinned **Core** ... **Mr. Excellent** pinned **Simon Ryme** ... **Quinn Nash** pinned **Ishmel** ... ***Semifinals:*** **Travis D** pinned Shockker ... Nash defeated **Mr. Excellent** ... ***Finals:*** **Travis D** beat Nash to win the title and the tournament ... **Buster Macabbi** pinned **Blaine Barret** to win the vacant breaker title.
(12-19-03)

—Brandon Jackson

PHILADELPHIA—Ring of Honor/All-Japan Pro Wrestling joint show at the National Guard Armory: ***Afternoon card:*** **Sumie Sakai** pinned **Allison Danger** ... **Josh Daniels** defeated **Puma** ... **Dunn** & **Marcos** wrestled **The Christopher Street Connection** to a no-contest when **C.M. Punk** interfered ... **C.M. Punk** beat **Mase** ... **Hydro** won a four-corner survival match that included **Slyk Wagner Brown**, **Nick Gage**, and **Oman Tortuga** ... **Special K** wrestled **The Carnage Crew** to a no-contest ... **Trent Acid** defeated **Sonjay Dutt** ... Tag team champs **Jay** & **Mark Briscoe** defeated **Joel** & **Jose Maximo** ... ***Evening card:*** **Bryan Danielson** defeated **Jay Briscoe** ... **John Walters** defeated **Xavier** in a "fight without honor" match ... **Matt Stryker** defeated **B.J. Whitmer** to win the Field of Honor ... ROH champ **Samoa Joe** beat **Mark Briscoe** ... **C.M. Punk** & **Colt Cabana** defeated **Tomoaki Honma** & **Kazushi Miyamoto** ... **A.J. Styles** defeated **Kaz Hayashi** ... **Satoshi Kojima** defeated **Homicide** ... AJPW tag team champions **The Great Muta** & **Arashi** defeated **Christopher Daniels** & **Dan Maff**.
(12-27-03)

—Mark Wills

PHILADELPHIA—Combat Zone Wrestling at Viking Hall: **Jon Dahmer** & **Cory Kastle** won a three-way match against **Jude** & **Niles Young** and **D.J. Hyde** & **Jamie Samuels** ... **Shun the Kabuki Kid** beat **G.Q.**, **Christian Wolfe**, and **Rick Feinberg** in a four-way match ... **Rockin' Rebel** & **Greg Matthews** won a three-way tag team match against **The Dirty Rotten Scoundrelz** and **Nick Berk** & **Z-Barr** ... **Jimmy Jacobs** won a three-way match against **Sabian** and **Derek Frazier** ... **Jimmy Rave** defeated iron man champ **Trent Acid** to win the title ... **Alex Shelley** beat **B-Boy** and **Chris Hero** in an elimination match ... **The Joker** defeated **Chris Cash** in a ladder match ... **Sonjay Dutt** defeated junior heavyweight champ **Ruckus** to win the title ... In the "Cage Of Death IV," **Zandig**, **Ian Knoxx**, **W-Beater**, **Lobo**, **Nick Gage**, & **New Jack** defeated **Trent Acid**, **Johnny Kashmere**, **B-Boy**, **Messiah**, **Nate Hatred**, & **Adam Flash**.
(12-13-03)

—Mark Wills

A lot of Batista's opponents are intimidated by his size, physique, and demeanor and thus are afraid to be aggressive against him. Not D-Von Dudley. He went after him hard and fast, but despite a game effort, he lost.

Chris Jericho had a 150-pound weight disadvantage and a gigantic strength advantage to overcome against Mark Henry. And he did it so well. It took a lot of cheating for Henry to prevail.

CHAMBERSBURG—National Wrestling League at the National Guard Armory: **Davey Boy Schitz** defeated **Tank Thomas** ... **Jerkface** & **Jimmy Jessup** beat **Sandy Saltine** & **Jimmy Dream** ... **Spyral** won a triple threat match over **The Freak** and **Brandon Mercury** ... **Gutterboy** & **Prof. Egon Ecton** won a four-team elimination match to win the tag team title against **Dan** & **Brent Rage**, **Shorty Smalls** & **Deuce Donnatelli**, and **John Rambo** & **Samu** ... **Chris Nightmare** & **Shawn Patrick** beat **Jason Stone** & **Chad Bowman** by disqualification ... **Chuckie Manson** won a falls-count-anywhere triangle match over **Scott Vaughn** and **Jake Davis** ... **Morgus the Maniac** beat **Dorian DeVille** by disqualification ... **OGB** pinned cruiserweight champion **Hyjinx** to win the title ... **The Pirate of the Caribbean** beat **Jimmy Cicero** ... **Nikolai Volkoff** beat heavyweight champion **Leslie Leatherman** by reverse decision disqualification.
(12-13-03)

—Timothy A. Walker

JOHNSTOWN—International Wrestling Cartel at the Cambria County War Memorial: **Sonjay Dutt** defeated **Chris Hero** ... **T. Rantula & Dennis Gregory** defeated **Bubba the Bulldog** & **Jimmy Vegas** by countout ... **Sebastian Dark** defeated **Shirley Doe** in a no-disqualification match ... **Colt Cabana** pinned **A.J. Styles** ... **Shane Douglas** defeated **Raven** in a streetfight ... **Dean Radford**, **J.T. Rodgers**, **Troy Lords**, & **Alex Shelley** beat **Eric Extasy**, **Super Hentai**, **Al B. Damn**, & **Jimmy Jacobs** in a tag team elimination match ... **Dr. Feelgood** beat **Carlton Kaz** by submission ... **Glenn Spectre** & **M-Dogg 20** beat **Devil Bhudakahn**, **Hyjinx**, & **Jake Garrett** in a handicap match ... Heavyweight champion **Sterling James Keenan** pinned **C.M. Punk**... **Dusty Rhodes** beat **Jerry Lawler (Mick Foley** was the guest referee).
(12-12-03)

—Timothy A. Walker

SOUTH CAROLINA

GREENVILLE—Universal Championship Wrestling at Wade Hampton High School: **Superstar II** beat **Jason King** ... **Cruiser** & **Norton Lewis** beat **Sonny Smooth** & **Dillon Rage** ... **Ronnie Gossett** & **Scottie Wrenn** beat **Cruiser** & **Norton Lewis** in a Texas tornado hardcore match ... **Jeff Lewis** won a six-man cruiserweight Royal Rumble-style battle royal to win the American junior heavyweight title ... **Rick Morton** beat **George South Sr.** to win the American heavyweight title ... **Dillon Rage** beat American junior heavyweight champion **Jeff Lewis** in a non title match ... ***UCW title tournament, semifinals:*** **Johnny Swinger** beat **Disco Inferno** ... **NWO Sting** beat **Mike Sanders** ... ***Finals:*** Swinger beat NWO Sting to win the title.
(12-27-03)

—Dan Parris

TENNESSEE

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** defeated **Kevin Northcutt** & **Legend** ... **Michael Shane** defeated **Christopher Daniels** and **Low-Ki** in a three-way match ... **David Young** pinned **Simon Diamond** ... **Shane Douglas** defeated **Elix Skipper** ... **Kid Kash** pinned **Chris Vaughn** ... **Julio Dinero** & **C.M. Punk** defeated **The Sandman** (whose partner, **Raven**, did not show up) in a handicap Singapore canes-on-poles match ... **A.J. Styles** & **Erik Watts** defeated **Jeff Jarrett** & **Abyss**.
(01-14-04)

—Matt Brock

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Abyss**, **Legend**, & **Kevin Northcutt** defeated **A.J. Styles**, **Chris Harris**, & **James Storm** ... NWA tag team champions **B.G. James** & **Ron Killings** beat **Simon Diamond** & **Johnny Swinger** ... **Chris Vaughn** pinned **Kid Kash** ... **Julio Dinero** & **C.M. Punk** defeated **Raven** & **The Sandman** ... **Chris Sabin** defeated NWA-TNA X champion **Michael Shane**, **Christopher Daniels**, and **Low-Ki** in a four-way "Ultimate X" match to win the title.
(01-07-04)

—Dan Murphy

NASHVILLE—WWE at the Municipal Auditorium: **Scotty Too Hotty** defeated **Nunzio** ... **Ernest Miller** pinned **Jamie Noble** ... **Bradshaw** pinned **Matt Morgan** ... **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** beat **Paul London** & **Spanky** ... **Chris Benoit** & **Hardcore Holly** beat **Chuck Palumbo** & **Johnny Stamboli** ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** defeated **Billy Kidman** and **Tajiri** in a three-way match ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** beat **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** and **Akio** & **Sakoda** in a three-way match ... **Dawn Marie** beat **Nidia** and **Sable** in a tiny teddy contest ... U.S. champion **The Big Show** beat **John Cena**.
(01-05-04)

—Mindy McDermott

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Sting** pinned NWA heavyweight champion **Jeff Jarrett** in a non-title match ... **Christopher Daniels** pinned **Chris Sabin** ... **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** defeated **Glenn Gilberti** & **David Young** in a streetfight ... **Simon Diamond** & **Johnny Swinger** beat **D-Lo Brown** & **A.J. Styles** ... NWA-TNA X champion **Michael Shane** pinned **Low-Ki** ... **Abyss**, **Legend**, & **Kevin Northcutt** beat **Julio Dinero**, **C.M. Punk**, & **Raven** in a steel cage match.
(12-17-03)

—Frank Miller

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Kid Kash** pinned **Don Harris** ... NWA-TNA X champion **Michael Shane** defeated **Christopher Daniels** by disqualification ... NWA tag team champions **B.G. James** & **Ron Killings** beat **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** ... **Julio Dinero** & **C.M. Punk** beat **Kevin Northcutt** & **Legend** ... **Chris Sabin** pinned **Shane Douglas** ... **Raven** defeated **Abyss** by disqualification ... **D-Lo Brown** & **A.J. Styles** beat **Jeff Jarrett** & **Kid Kash**.
(12-10-03)

—Frank Miller

HUNTSVILLE—Southern Wrestling Alliance at Scott High School: **The Orphan** & **C.J. Summers** defeated tag team champions **The Weapons of Mass Destruction** to win the title ... **Hex Hatred** pinned **Jason Fear** ... **Hayley Hatred** pinned women's champion **Tiffani Monroe** to win the title ... **Eric Adamz** defeated **Adam Antieum** in a taped-fist match ... **Hex Hatred** pinned cruiserweight champion **C.J. Summers** to win the title ... U.S. champion **Doink the Clown** defeated **The Diamond Studd** and **Johnny Graham** in a triple threat match ... **Johnny Graham** won a battle royal.
(12-20-03)

—Paul Ledbetter

TEXAS

DALLAS—Mexican/American Wrestling Promotions at the MAWP Arena: **Gavilan** pinned **Matt Meyers** ... **Mace** & **Bull Terrier** defeated **El Pulpo** & **Ricky Jackson** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **Astro Azul** & **Larry Green** beat **Aguila Negra** & **Mexican Power** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **Scorpio**, **Inhumano**, & **Tigre Potosino** defeated **Angel Latino**, **Sombra X**, & **Dragon Oriental** in a best-of-three-falls match
(12-28-03)

—Travis McKeon

SAN ANTONIO—River City Wrestling at the Woodlawn Gym: **The Great Muta** & **Arashi** defeated **Pete Lothario** & **Hotstuff Hernandez** ... Heavyweight champion **Jeromy Sage** defeated **Kazushi Miyamoto** ... **Kaz Hayashi** pinned **Jeremy Lopez** ... **The Great Koji** defeated **Black Gordman Jr.** ... **Shadow** won a three-way dance over **Tomoaki Honma** and **A.C. Riddick** ... **Joel** & **Jose Maximo** defeated **Alex Heat** & **Manny Domingo** ... **Homicide** defeated **Psycho Simpson** ... **Masada** pinned **Fast Eddie** ... **Bio-Hazard** and **Blue Angel** wrestled to a draw for the vacant U.S. title.
(12-28-03)

—Becca Walters

ARLINGTON—Professional Championship Wrestling at the PCW Arena: **Gabe Roach** pinned **Steve DeMarco** ... **C-Diddy** pinned **Justin 2 Fine**. As the result of a prematch stipulation, Justin and manager **Rick Vovk** had to be Diddy's slaves for the next 60 days ... TV champ **Jared Steele** beat **Chris Stevens** by disqualification ... Light heavyweight champ **B.J. Cummings** pinned **Christopher Daniels** ... **Mike Foxx** beat heavyweight champ **SHADOW** in a best-of-three-falls match to win the title.
(12-20-03)

—Rob Moore

DENTON—Xtreme Championship Wrestling at the XCW Arena: **Bullman Downs** pinned **Aldo Nova** ... Ironman champion **Eric Idol** beat **Chris Richter** ... **Team Extreme** beat tag champs **Bull** & **D-Money** to win the belts ... Heavyweight champion **El Convicto** wrestled **John Allen** to a draw in a 30-minute "Ironman" match ... **Scott Phoenix** pinned **Drunk Adam** in a "no-rope, steel cage-wrapped-in-barbed-wire" match.
(12-19-03)

—Rob Moore

VIRGINIA

CAIRO—Supreme Championship Wrestling at the Cairo Community Center: **Roger Blade** pinned **The Bout It Kid** ... **Mason the Mangler** beat **Madd-Dawg Murphy** ... **Eric Draven** beat **The Rebel** in a lumberjack match ... **Brandon Hunter** & **Todd Morton** defeated tag team champions **ESP** in a non-title match ... **Spazz** & **Big Mike D** wrestled to a time-limit draw ... **Billy Maverick** pinned **The Animal** in a cage match.
(12-13-03)

—Joey Adams

WISCONSIN

ALLENTON—Powerhouse Pro Wrestling at Cecil's Place: **Lt. Mack** defeated **Steve Storm** ... **Krazy Gorman** beat **The Nark** ... **Red Lightning** defeated **Justin Sane** ... **Lt. Mack** defeated **Blue Jabroni** ... **Bruce Allen** defeated **Eric Young** ... **Iron Horse** beat **Matty Blast** ... **Bruce Allen** won a battle royal.
(12-19-03)

—Nicholas Loken

INTERNATIONAL

AUSTRALIA

PERTH—WWE at the Burwood Dome: Cruiserweight champion **Tajiri** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.** and **Jamie Noble** in a three-way match ... **Billy Kidman** & **Funaki** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** beat **Nunzio** & **Johnny Stamboli** ... **Ric Flair** defeated **A-Train** ... **John Cena** & **Hardcore Holly** defeated **The Big Show** & **Matt Morgan** ... **Dawn Marie** defeated **Nidia** and **Shaniqua** in a tiny teddy contest (**Bradshaw** was the judge) ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** defeated **Chris Benoit**.
(12-06-03)

—Jason Conlan

CANADA

ST. JOHN'S, NEW BRUNSWICK—WWE at Mile One Stadium: **Spike Dudley** beat **Rob Conway** ... **Lance Storm** & **Val Venis** beat **Kevin Fertig** & **Travis Tomko** ... **Steven Richards** pinned **Test** ... Women's champion **Molly Holly** defeated **Trish Stratus**, **Lita**, and **Jazz** in a four-way elimination match ... **Batista** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** defeated **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** ... Intercontinental champion **Randy Orton** pinned **Christian** ... **Booker T** defeated **Matt Hardy** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Kane**.
(01-11-04)

—Jerry Jarrone

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA—WWE at the Metro Centre: **Test** pinned **Steven Richards** ... **Lance Storm** & **Val Venis** beat **Kevin Fertig** & **Travis Tomko** ... Intercontinental champion **Randy Orton** pinned **Christian** ... Women's champion **Molly Holly** defeated **Trish Stratus**, **Lita**, and **Jazz** in a four-way elimination match ... **Rene Dupree** defeated **Spike Dudley** ... **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** beat **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** in a table match ... **Booker T** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Batista** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Kane**.
(01-10-04)

—Randy Ryan

OSHAWA, ONTARIO—WWE at the Civic Auditorium: **Test** pinned **Steven Richards** ... **Lance Storm** & **Val Venis** defeated **Kevin Fertig** & **Travis Tomko** ... **Rene Dupree** pinned **Spike Dudley** ... **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** defeated **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** in a table match ... Intercontinental champion **Randy Orton** defeated **Christian** ... **Booker T** pinned **Batista** ... Women's champion **Molly Holly** beat **Lita**, **Jazz**, and **Trish Stratus** in a four-way elimination match ... **The Hurricane** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Kane**.
(01-09-04)

—Matt Brock

DARTMOUTH, NOVA SCOTIA—MainStream Wrestling at Dave Doolittle's Sports Bar & Grill: **Kyle Kruze** defeated **C.N. Power** and **Outcast** in a triple threat match ... **Paco Loco** beat Atlantic Canadian champion **Calum Macbeth** in an "I Quit" match to regain the title ... **Pistol Pete** pinned **Firefly** ... Heavyweight champion **Lincoln Steen** pinned **Tony Armstrong**.
(12-18-03)

—Devin Chittick

ENGLAND

LONDON—BECW's "Eve Of Destruction" at Melcombe Hall: **The Essex Boys** beat **The Lo-Ryders** ... **Pete Payne** pinned **Cybertype** ... **Ed Gamestar** beat **Will Gamestar**, **Bourne Heartless**, and **The Outcast** in a four-way elimination match ... Heavyweight champion **Paul Phoenix** beat **The Scorpion** and **Metal** in a triple threat "Three Stages Of Hell" match ... **Ed Gamestar** won a 15-man battle royal.
(12-05-03)

—Ben Lawrence

SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE—WWE at the Singapore Indoor Stadium: **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** defeated **Chuck Palumbo** & **Johnny Stamboli** ... **Ultimo Dragon** pinned **Shannon Moore** ... **Funaki** & **Billy Kidman** beat **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** ... **Shaniqua** pinned **Dawn Marie** ... Cruiserweight champion **Tajiri** beat **Jamie Noble**, **Nunzio**, and **Rey Misterio Jr.** in an elimination match ... **Bradshaw**, **John Cena**, & **Hardcore Holly** defeated **The Big Show**, **Matt Morgan**, & **Nathan Jones** ... Smackdown tag team champions **The Basham Brothers** beat **Eddie** & **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Ric Flair** beat **A-Train** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** beat **Chris Benoit**.
(12-05-03)

—Michael Herndon

Rob Van Dam wrestled a mostly conservative match against Randy Orton, and that might have surprised the Intercontinental champ. RVD had many near-falls before Orton eked out a victory.

PWI classic

From the September 1995 issue of *PWI*

You Want To Know—We Have To Tell!

HOW HOT IS SHERRI MARTEL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HARLEM HEAT?

Is Sherri's management style really hands-on? Can Harlem Heat keep their cool in the privacy of a hotel room? You'll be shocked at what we saw—and heard!

By Chris Bernucca

THE HOTEL LOBBY is buzzing with activity. It is late-afternoon. Dozens of people are checking in. Lines are forming, bellboys are scurrying, and reporters are snooping.

WCW World tag team champions Harlem Heat—Booker T and Stevie Ray—and manager Sherri Martel enter the lobby. The trio attracts an obsessed crowd of autograph-seekers who stake out hotels at every stop on the WCW itinerary. The men and their manager work their way through the crowd and toward the registration desk. In the midst of the chaos, they do not see the familiar face of the snooping reporter they know all-too-well. Sherri shoves an overzealous teenage girl away from her men.

This is why *PWI* is here. There have always been questions about the relationships between male wrestlers and their female man-

Sherri Martel enjoys a lighter moment with Booker T. She could have been laughing at something that happened in the ring, or maybe it was just one of those inside jokes that only people in a very close relationship together understand.

agers. In most cases, those questions need not be asked. The people involved are professionals and recognize that the goal is to win matches, not make them.

But it is behavior that Sherri exhibited in the lobby that has forced us to ask the questions. You have seen the matches and the interviews; we are not imagining things. She throws herself into the middle of brawls, disqualifying the champions, but preventing them from absorbing any abuse. She dresses like them, barely covering what should be covered. She puts her arm around their necks and nuzzles up against them, refusing to move. She looks at them longingly, as if there is something more to their relationship than they are willing to let on. That is why *PWI* is here.

They are very careful in public. There is no hand-holding, no caressing, no anything. There is an occasional wink or laugh, but nothing that doesn't come from normal, mundane conversation. If there is any dirt to be dug up, we are going to need a pretty good shovel.

A bellboy with a goatee and long, uneven sideburns puts their travel bags on a pushcart and heads for the elevator bank. The electric monitor shows the elevator stopping at 11. When the bellboy returns to the lobby, he is accosted by a man holding a $20 bill—a man

When Booker T needed help during a match, Sherri didn't mind planting her fist in Jerry Sags' nose. Inquiring minds had to wonder, however, if Sherri would have gotten this involved if she didn't care very, very, very deeply for the men she managed.

PG-13

PWI ratings

September 1995

TOP 10
1. Diesel
2. Sting
3. Razor Ramon
4. Hulk Hogan
5. Jeff Jarrett
6. Randy Savage
7. Jerry Lawler
8. Bret Hart
9. The Undertaker
10. Ric Flair

TAG TEAMS
1. Owen Hart & Yokozuna
2. Harlem Heat
3. The Smoking Gunns
4. The Rock 'n' Roll Express
5. The Nasty Boys
6. Al Snow & Unibomb
7. Public Enemy
8. PG-13
9. Lex Luger & Davey Boy Smith
10. The Pit Bulls

WCW
World champion: Hulk Hogan
1. Sting
2. Randy Savage
3. Ric Flair
4. Alex Wright
5. Vader
6. Arn Anderson
7. Paul Orndorff
8. Brian Pillman
9. Meng
10. Bubba Rogers

WWF
World champion: Diesel
1. Jeff Jarrett
2. Razor Ramon
3. Sid Vicious
4. Jerry Lawler
5. Bret Hart
6. Bam Bam Bigelow
7. Hakushi
8. Mabel
9. Bob Holly
10. Tatanka

ECW
Heavyweight champion: The Sandman
1. Shane Douglas
2. Cactus Jack
3. Eddie Guerrero
4. Dean Malenko
5. Axl Rotten
6. 911
7. Tasmaniac
8. Marty Jannetty
9. Tommy Dreamer
10. Ian Rotten

MOST POPULAR
1. Shawn Michaels
2. Hulk Hogan
3. Diesel
4. Sting
5. The Undertaker
6. Bret Hart
7. Randy Savage
8. Razor Ramon
9. Bam Bam Bigelow
10. Tony Anthony

MOST HATED
1. Sid Vicious
2. Vader
3. Bob Backlund
4. Jeff Jarrett
5. Tatanka
6. Owen Hart
7. Ric Flair
8. Buddy Landell
9. Jerry Lawler
10. Bubba Rogers

Martel didn't like having her hair pulled and getting beaten up by Sags, but she'd tell you she'd do anything for her men. Her relationship with Harlem Heat seemed too intense to be strictly professional.

who is asking a lot of questions.

"That woman with the two wrestlers," he is asked. "Same room or different rooms?"

"Different rooms, but next to each other," he replies. "You can go from one room to the other through a connecting door."

"What else? What did they say?"

"They asked about pay-per-view movies and room service," the bellboy says. "She asked if we have champagne on the room service menu. She said she was tired and started getting undressed right in front of me, like she couldn't wait to get into bed. She asked me to put the sign on her door."

The reporter thanks the bellboy and heads for the stairwell. When he reaches the 11th floor, he begins a casual stroll of the hallways, stopping at each door and listening for the types of sounds that only certain activities could produce. It takes two dozen doors, but he finds what he is looking for behind 1118, which has a "Do Not

Sherri always stood by Booker T when he insulted The Nasty Boys (right) and was always there to offer an embrace when he was hurt (above). Even we were not sure what happened when Harlem Heat and Sherri were behind closed doors.

Disturb" sign dangling from the doorknob.

There are definitely people of both sexes on the other side of this door. There is a lot of laughing and whispering, which finally subsides after about 25 minutes. There is the sound of someone going through the partition between the rooms, which seems like the proper cue for the reporter to head back to the stairwell.

In the lobby, he comes across the same bellboy and offers him another $20 bill to check on room service orders. "Just let me know if there's one for 1118 or 1119," he tells the bellboy.

The goatee returns 15 minutes later. "There's one for 1119," he says. "Four cheeseburgers, a chef's salad, some spring water, and a bottle of champagne. What's this about? Are you a private investigator or somethin'?"

The reporter doesn't answer as he scribbles something in his notebook. He tears out the page and hands it to the bellboy. "Make sure this goes in one of the food tins, and there'll be another 20 here for you."

The reporter heads back to the stairwell and sprints up the 11 flights. He waits at the end of the corridor for 45 minutes before another bellboy emerges from the elevator with a cart of food. He stops in front of 1119 and knocks on the door. A large man wearing nothing but a towel around his waist takes a half-step into the corridor before allowing the bellboy into the room.

Two minutes later, the bellboy

It's not like Ms. Martel has ever had a rule against getting involved with men in wrestling or anything. Remember the brief but bizarre romance she enjoyed with Col. Rob Parker in WCW?

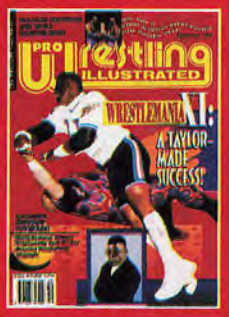
emerges from the room and heads for the elevator. The reporter stations himself outside 1119. The conversation is barely audible ... until the note is discovered.

"Hey, Sherri, what the hell is this?" a voice booms. There is a silence before a woman's voice can be heard. She is shouting. The reporter beats a path for the stairwell.

The trio checks out the following morning, taking extra looks over their shoulders as they make their way from the elevator bank to the registration desk. They still have not spotted the reporter, who is stationed in a seat behind a beam, where he can still see all the activity at the desk.

While the wrestling manager waits for the desk clerk to tabulate the incidentals, she sneaks a peek over her shoulder. She believes—for now, at least—the coast is clear. She smiles at one of her wrestlers and rests her tired head on his left shoulder. The reporter stands and quickly leaves the lobby, never bothering to look back. He has seen and heard enough. □

PWI, September 1995



The cover: The main headline for this cover was easy. We were providing extensive match-by-match coverage of WrestleMania XI, and the event was headlined by the much-publicized match between Bam Bam Bigelow and former NFL megastar Lawrence Taylor, in which LT prevailed in a huge upset. So we labeled 'Mania a "Taylor-made success." And Taylor's performance was surprisingly strong. Nine years later, LT vs. Bigelow and Diesel vs. Shawn Michaels were the only truly memorable matches. Number 11 wasn't one of the better WrestleManias.

The centerfold: Another easy choice. Who better to feature than the man who won the WWF World title match at WrestleMania, Kevin "Diesel" Nash? At the time, Nash was nearing the midway point of a WWF title reign that would last just a week short of a full year. No champion has held that title (or the Raw or Smackdown title) for more than nine months since. By the way, one day after Diesel's WrestleMania XI defense against Shawn Michaels, the two united against Sid Vicious, Michaels' bodyguard at 'Mania.

His Way Was A Fine Way: What prompted Steve Austin to bellow, "Screw the world—I'll do it my way!" in 1995? It was all the talk about when (or if) he would win the WCW World title. He grew sick of it, but even most of his enemies agreed he was a star just waiting to break out. We all know he did win world titles—just not in WCW. And check out this pre-"Stone-Cold" era quote: "The bottom line is that it will happen when it happens, and only when I say it will happen."

Ultimately Wrong: Almost everyone who expected Hulk Hogan's "ultimate surprise" at WCW Uncensored '95 to be a returning Ultimate Warrior were disappointed that they got the debuting Renegade, a rookie made up to look like Warrior, instead. But we urged everyone to give Renegade a chance, noting that he might turn out to at least be more dedicated to wrestling than Warrior. Sadly, things didn't work out well in the end. Rick "Renegade" Wilson committed suicide at the age of 33 in 1999.

The Taming Of Sabu: Nine years ago, Sabu was one of the hottest young wrestlers in the world. He had no regard for the well-being of his body or the bodies of those he wrestled. He was that wild, reckless, and, well, uncivilized. And those close to him wanted him to remain that way. They were concerned that marketing people, advertising executives with lucrative endorsement offers, investment counselors, and the like might take a bite out of Sabu's savagery.

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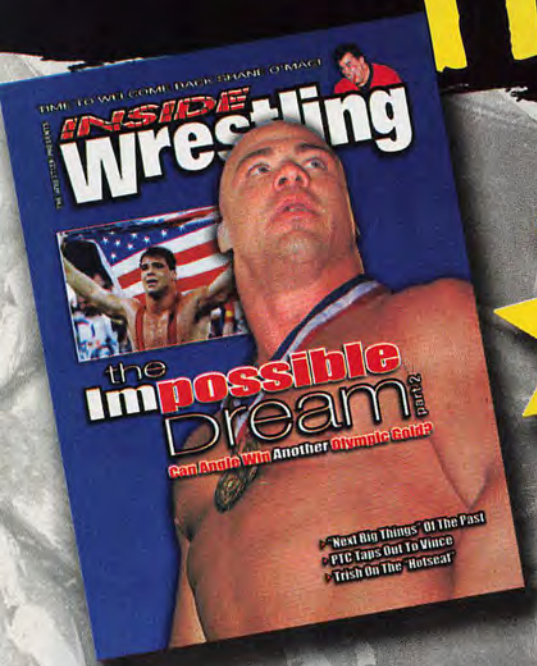
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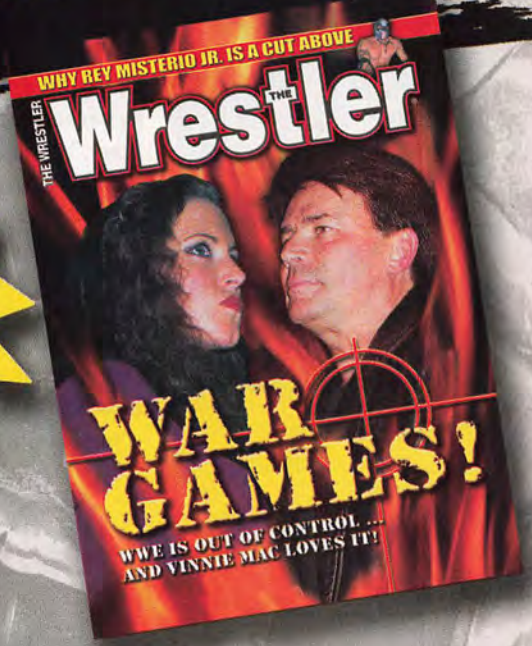

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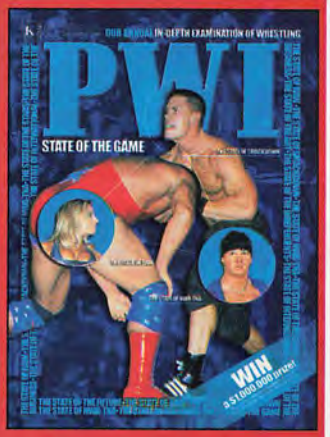
Or you can e-mail your comments to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com
Letters preceded by a ☎ indicate letters left by fans on the *PWI* Hotline (1-900-226-4PWI; see ad elsewhere in this issue).

STATE OF CONFUSION



Many questions, not enough answers. That was our consensus when we evaluated the state of wrestling's future, as well as everything else related to the state of the game, in our February 2004 issue. Our readers were also undecided when it came to getting a grip on the state of this crazy sport.

"I agree with your assessment of the 'State Of The Independents' in that there's more emphasis on *survival* than anything else," wrote Jim Carney of Lewiston, New York. "Indy feds are dying all the time, and even the ones that run regular shows are lucky to draw 200 people. Things look bleak on the indy scene."

"You were too harsh in 'State Of The Future,'" e-mailed Todd Johnson of Meadville, Pennsylvania. "WWE is very profitable and should continue to be so. Wrestling may be on a small downswing, but there's no reason for me to believe the business won't bounce back soon."

"Your analysis really nailed what's wrong with Raw, and, to a lesser degree, Smackdown," wrote Susan Janssen of Erie, Pennsylvania. "Raw has been stagnant, though it's showing signs of improvement. Smackdown is starting to stagnate. I hope WWE Creative read your analysis and is looking for ways to improve things."

GIVE MOLLY PROPS

I cannot dispute that Trish Stratus has improved greatly since her WWE debut, but how can you even begin to think of her as "the best of the current generation" ("State Of The Stars," February 2004), a title that belongs to Molly Holly. Although Molly may not possess the beauty of Trish, she is the most technically sound female wrestler on TV today. I respect the majority of views expressed in your magazine, but I feel that you have fallen flat on your faces on this one.

ANDREW OLSON
Austin, MN

Discussion of which female wrestler is the best of her generation should include the name of Molly Holly, according to reader Andrew Olson.

DIFFERENT NAMES, SAME PRODUCT

After reading your assessments of Raw and Smackdown (February 2004), I find myself in agreement with many of your observations. However, when you attempt to declare Raw and Smackdown as "showing signs of offering distinct products rather than just being one with red ropes and the other with blue ropes," I must disagree. Two brands … identical products. You can say until the cows come home that Raw emphasizes more over-the-top melodrama, and Smackdown emphasizes athletic wrestling, but I think it's more succinct to say that Smackdown emphasizes sports entertainment, and Raw emphasizes entertainment.

WWE has mishandled the brand extension on every level. When I first heard about the idea, I was intrigued. The idea of *one* company operating two *different* promotions under one roof, uniting them for special occasions, like WrestleMania or the Royal Rumble … but, alas, it was just a dream. They are on and the same, with the same McMahons running around, along with the Bischoffs and Heymans, doing the same things in the same ways.

Specialization is the future of this business—the future of *any* business. Imagine, for a moment, a Raw in which the World title is the centerpiece of the show, the greatest prize of all, chased by a roster of big names: Triple-H, Kurt Angle, Brock Lesnar, Goldberg. A Raw in which the Intercontinental title means as much strapped

around the waist of a well-handled Booker T or Scott Steiner as it did around Savage's, Steamboat's, or HBK's. A Raw in which women are divas, not wrestlers. Now, imagine a Smackdown that addresses the growing interest in athleticism in the ring. A company in which the cruiserweight title is elevated to the importance of a world title. A brand influenced by independent spirit, drawing from sources like Ring of Honor, TNA's X division, ECW, Lucha Libre, and the Super 8. A Smackdown in which women wrestle and are stars on the same level as the men.

Is there any doubt that a promotion that emphasized athleticism, technique, and competition would benefit a wrestler like Rob Van Dam more than the hijinks of Raw? Two different shows? *Raw* is *Nitro* is *Smackdown* is *Heat* is *Thunder* is ...

SCOTT HUNT
charliehustle732000@yahoo.com

THUMBS UP TO THE HALL

I just wanted to say how much I appreciate *PWI's* new *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame feature. I think it's great that *PWI* can acknowledge the existence of the *Wrestling Observer* and do its part to recognize some of the great names from the past.

In recent months, *PWI* has showcased legends such as The Destroyer, The Sheik, Freddie Blassie, and even Atsushi Onita, a man I never expected to see profiled in an American magazine. Too many fans today don't know about some of the truly great stars from the past, and this feature is a fantastic way to introduce them to these superstars.

Thank you, *PWI*, for doing your part to share the rich legacy of our great sport with a new generation. I look forward to reading about one of my favorites, "Big Cat" Ernie Ladd, in a future edition of the Hall of Fame.

TIMOTHY SCHMIDT
Cleveland, OH

DON'T BOO JEFF!

I just finished reading "Jeff Hardy's Ring Of Horror" (January 2004), and it made me sick to my stomach! That article did nothing but trash Jeff Hardy. Jeff did nothing to make those fans hate him. The fans that booed him and did those catcalls were immature and don't even deserve to be called his fans. I also feel that it's the company's fault that Jeff got that reaction; they told him that those fans were there just to see him and to join him as he entered this new phase of his career.

Well, the fans didn't even give Jeff a chance to show them what he had. All they wanted was to boo him. Jeff didn't deserve to be treated like that. He is a very talented young man. His confidence must have been shaken, and I'm sure it was hard to return to the ring, but he should have been given the respect he deserved. A true fan will give a wrestler the chance to compete and not boo him right out of the gate.

Jeff Hardy (shown raising the hand of Crazy K) didn't hear many cheers before, during, or after his one appearance in Ring of Honor last year, and that still burns Sarah Weisheit.

I don't know if this is going to get printed, but I hope it does, and I hope Jeff gets the chance to read this, because at least he'll know that there is one fan out there that actually cares about his feelings. I honestly feel that when he got that reaction, he was really hurt by that and it's why he only did one show for Ring of Honor.

SARAH WEISHEIT
Albany, NY

HOORAY FOR MR. J!

Just wanted to let you know how much I enjoy Jason Conlan's cartoons in *PWI*. "Drawing Blood" is one of my guilty pleasures. I buy *PWI* mainly for the insightful columns and in-depth coverage of various indy promotions, as well as the first-class photos and stories on WWE. But I always find myself peeking to the back to see which stars Conlan has skewered this month.

This may be a crazy idea, but I'd love to see Conlan draw a caricature photo of the *PWI* staff. I'd love to see his take on Queen Brandi, Stu Saks, Matt Brock, and the rest of the crew. That would be a classic cartoon.

Mr. Conlan, keep up the good work!

JOE GELSOMINO
Portland, OR □

PWI Hotline Extra!

Your answers to our question of the week!

Question of the Week: Given that Goldberg's contract expires shortly after WrestleMania, do you think WWE should re-sign him? (January 6 to 12, 2004)

Hotline callers respond: "I think it would depend on the deal," said Tim Hayes of Sacramento, California. "I know WWE paid through the nose to get him for one year. WWE should scale back on the offer and see if Goldberg's willing to negotiate. If he balks, let him walk."

"Goldberg's finally getting some momentum. It'd be a shame if WWE let him go now," said Josh Thomas of Hilton Head, South Carolina. "He has improved in the ring. He's shown he's willing to do what WWE asks of him. I think WWE owes him another year."

"I can't see why WWE would bother," replied Chris Cooper of Modesto, California. "After all, Linda McMahon called him a disappointment. I don't see WWE making the effort to make Goldberg a worthwhile investment."

PWI official ratings

For period ended January 24, 2004

TOP 10

1. **BROCK LESNAR**
   295, Minneapolis, MN
   (1) WWE Smackdown champion
2. **TRIPLE-H**
   269, Greenwich, CT
   (2) WWE Raw champion
3. **KENTA KOBASHI**
   282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
   (7) GHC heavyweight champion
4. **SHAWN MICHAELS**
   217, San Antonio, TX
   (–) No. 1 contender: WWE Raw title
5. **TOSHIAKI KAWADA**
   245, Ashikaga, Japan
   (3) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
6. **JEFF JARRETT**
   230, Nashville, TN
   (4) NWA heavyweight champion
7. **RANDY ORTON**
   265, St. Louis, MO
   (–) WWE Intercontinental champion
8. **HARDCORE HOLLY**
   249, Mobile, AL
   (–) No. 1 contender: WWE Smackdown title
9. **CHRIS BENOIT**
   224, Edmonton, Alberta
   (6) No. 2 contender: WWE Smackdown title
10. **NICK DINSMORE**
    226, Jefferson, IN
    (–) OVW heavyweight champion

Hardcore Holly

TAG TEAMS

1. **THE BASHAM BROTHERS**
   Combined weight: 492 pounds
   (1) WWE Smackdown tag team champions
2. **OSAMU NISHIMURA & HIROYOSHI TENZAN**
   Combined weight: 495 pounds
   (7) IWGP International tag team champions
3. **BATISTA & RIC FLAIR**
   Combined weight: 561 pounds
   (4) WWE Raw tag team champions
4. **BUH BUH RAY & D-VON DUDLEY**
   Combined weight: 579 pounds
   (2) No. 1 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
5. **MITSUHARU MISAWA & YOSHINARI OGAWA**
   Combined weight: 430 pounds
   (–) GHC tag team champions
6. **B.G. JAMES & RON KILLINGS**
   Combined weight: 491 pounds
   (5) NWA tag team champions
7. **SHELTON BENJAMIN & CHARLIE HAAS**
   Combined weight: 510 pounds
   (10) No. 1 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
8. **GARRISON CADE & MARK JINDRAK**
   Combined weight: 506 pounds
   (–) No. 2 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
9. **KAZ HAYASHI & SATOSHI KOJIMA**
   Combined weight: 416 pounds
   (–) All-Japan International tag team champions
10. **CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM**
    Combined weight: 516 pounds
    (–) No. 1 contenders: NWA tag title

WWE RAW

Raw Champion:
TRIPLE-H
(C) 269, Greenwich, CT

1—**SHAWN MICHAELS** *(9) 217, San Antonio, TX*
2—**RANDY ORTON** *(4) 265, St. Louis, MO*
3—**BATISTA** *(5) 318, Washington, DC*
4—**ROB VAN DAM** *(3) 237, Battle Creek, MI*
5—**KANE** *(1) 326, St. Louis, MO*
6—**CHRIS JERICHO** *(7) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba*
7—**BILL GOLDBERG** *(2) 283, Tulsa, OK*
8—**BOOKER T** *(6) 250, Houston, TX*
9—**CHRISTIAN** *(10) 225, Toronto, Ontario*
10—**MARK HENRY** *(8) 372, Austin, TX*

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown Champion:
BROCK LESNAR
(C) 295, Minneapolis, MN

1—**HARDCORE HOLLY** *(9) 249, Mobile, AL*
2—**CHRIS BENOIT** *(1) 224, Edmonton, Alberta*
3—**JOHN CENA** *(2) 260, Los Angeles, CA*
4—**REY MISTERIO JR.** *(5) 163, San Diego, CA*
5—**THE BIG SHOW** *(3) 485, Aiken, SC*
6—**EDDIE GUERRERO** *(6) 223, El Paso, TX*
7—**JAMIE NOBLE** *(8) 190, Hanover, WV*
8—**CHAVO GUERRERO JR.** *(–) 185, El Paso, TX*
9—**TAJIRI** *(4) 213, Tokyo, Japan*
10—**A-TRAIN** *(7) 353, Boston, MA*

OVW

OVW Champion:
NICK DINSMORE
(2) 226, Jefferson, IN

1—**JOHNNY JETER** *(1) 218, San Diego, CA*
2—**MARK MAGNUS** *(C) 231, Syracuse, NY*
3—**INSPECTOR IMPACT** *(–) 285, Phoenix, AZ*
4—**CHRIS CAGE** *(4) 220, Youngstown, OH*
5—**CARLY COLON** *(6) 210, San Turce, Puerto Rico*
6—**NOVA** *(–) 214, Bricktown, NJ*
7—**JOHN HENNIGAN** *(5) 204, Los Angeles, CA*
8—**SEVEN** *(9) 278, Memphis, TN*
9—**AARON STEVENS** *(10) 237, Boston, MA*
10—**MATT CAPPOTELLI** *(3) 220, Norwich, NY*

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:
SAMOA JOE
(C) 270, American Samoa

1—**JAY BRISCOE** *(7) 184, Laurel, DE*
2—**A.J. STYLES** *(1) 202, Gainesville, GA*
3—**CHRISTOPHER DANIELS** *(2) 210, Los Angeles, CA*
4—**MATT STRYKER** *(4) 220, Cincinnati, OH*
5—**DANNY MAFF** *(–) 245, Brooklyn, NY*
6—**B.J. WHITMER** *(6) 210, Owensboro, KY*
7—**MARK BRISCOE** *(9) 188, Laurel, DE*
8—**C.M. PUNK** *(5) 220, Chicago, IL*
9—**JOHN WALTERS** *(–) 220, Boston, MA*
10—**JUSTIN CREDIBLE** *(–) 227, Waterbury, CT*

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue. while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

BORDER CITY WRESTLING: Champion—Shane Douglas; **1**—Raven; **2**—Chris Sabin; **3**—Dyson Pryce; **4**—Eric Young; **5**—A-1; **6**—Bobby Rude; **7**—Alex Shelley; **8**—Mike Legacy; **9**—Johnny Bravo; **10**—Jaime D.

FAR NORTH WRESTLING: Champion—T. Rantula; **1**—Dennis Gregory; **2**—The Honky Tonk Man; **3**—Powerhouse Hughes; **4**—Hallowicked; **5**—Mike Quackenbush; **6**—Lord Zoltan; **7**—Rich Myers; **8**—Dean Jablonski; **9**—Kevin Grace; **10**—Joey Knight.

INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Roman; **1**—Brandon Young; **2**—Kevin Knight; **3**—Fred Sampson; **4**—Shawn Donavan; **5**—Biggie Biggs; **6**—Travis Blake; **7**—Shane O'Brien; **8**—Dan McGuire; **9**—Eloy Fiesta; **10**—The Patriot.

INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Rahn Jordan; **1**—Phillip Pain; **2**—Executioner; **3**—James Boulevard; **4**—Panhead Nelson; **5**—Casey J; **6**—Tommy Sawyer; **7**—Tow Truck; **8**—Billy Starr; **9**—Don Matthews; **10**—The Tower.

METRO WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Brian Blade; **1**—Terry Alan; **2**—Big Daddy Slash; **3**—Phoenix; **4**—Vito Andretti; **5**—Jad T. Lungini; **6**—Amazing Pookie; **7**—Mongoose; **8**—Miami Thug; **9**—Man Mountain Dean; **10**—Tim Baker.

MIDWEST POWERHOUSE WRESTLING: Champion—Greed; **1**—The Searcher; **2**—Chico Es Loco; **3**—Bob Orton Jr.; **4**—Dan Severn; **5**—Envy; **6**—Lust; **7**—Curtis Payne; **8**—Gluttony; **9**—Jack Thriller; **10**—Sloth.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Title Vacant; **1**—Ken Steel; **2**—Dustin Daniels; **3**—KnightStalker; **4**—Dragan Frost; **5**—Seth; **6**—Frank Savage; **7**—Wyld Chyld; **8**—The Unknown Soldier; **9**—Tone-Up; **10**—Buffalo Frits.

NATIONAL WRESTLING LEAGUE: Champion—Leslie Leatherman; **1**—Jake Davis; **2**—The Patriot; **3**—John Rambo; **4**—Gutterboy; **5**—Nikolai Volkoff; **6**—Shark Boy; **7**—Samu; **8**—John Balsamo; **9**—King Kaluha; **10**—Hyjinx.

NWA FLORIDA: Champion—Steve Corino; **1**—Steve Madison; **2**—Shinya Hashimoto; **3**—Masato Tanaka; **4**—Mike Sullivan; **5**—Scoot Andrews; **6**—Lex Lovett; **7**—Jerry Lynn; **8**—Bruce Steele; **9**—Midian; **10**—Roderick Strong.

NWA WILDSIDE: Champion—Onyx; **1**—Abyss; **2**—Caprice Coleman; **3**—Rainman; **4**—Mikal Adryan; **5**—Iceberg; **6**—Murder One; **7**—Altar Boy Luke; **8**—Fast Eddie; **9**—Gabriel; **10**—Azrael.

PWF NORTHEAST: Champion—Kid Krazy; **1**—Johnny Curtis; **2**—T.J. Richter; **3**—Billy Black; **4**—Hiroshi Asai; **5**—Paul Hudson; **6**—Jose Perez; **7**—Mike Paiva; **8**—Ebony Blade; **9**—Jason Blade; **10**—Adam Hastey.

STEEL RAGE PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Brandon Groom; **1**—Ian St. James; **2**—Shane Morbid; **3**—Harry Sanchez; **4**—Dexter Hardaway; **5**—Cade Sydal; **6**—Luc LaPoint; **7**—Bobby Dalton; **8**—X-Cal; **9**—Chris Dent; **10**—Shawn Chadwick.

NWA

NWA Champion:
JEFF JARRETT
(C) 230, Nashville, TN

1—RAVEN
(2) 243, Short Hills, NJ
2—A.J. STYLES
(1) 202, Gainesville, GA
3—J.T. WOLFEN
(3) 297, New Haven, CT
4—ROB STARDOM
(6) 215, Winnipeg, Manitoba
5—RICKY MURDOCH
(4) 261, Houston, TX
6—STEVE CORINO
(–) 219, Sea Isle City, NJ
7—ONYX
(9) 218, Jamaica City, NY
8—DANNY DOMINION
(–) 233, Malibu, CA
9—JERELLE CLARK
(–) 190, Orlando, FL
10—CHANCE PROPHET
(–) 265, Chicago, IL

NWA-TNA

NWA Champion:
JEFF JARRETT
(C) 230, Nashville, TN

1—CHRIS SABIN
(6) 207, Hell, MI
2—A.J. STYLES
(2) 202, Gainesville, GA
3—MICHAEL SHANE
(1) 221, San Antonio, TX
4—RAVEN
(4) 243, Short Hills, NJ
5—KID KASH
(5) 202, Johnson City, TN
6—ABYSS
(7) 308, parts unknown
7—LOW-KI
(–) 170, Brooklyn, NY
8—SHANE DOUGLAS
(9) 255, Pittsburgh, PA
9—D-LO BROWN
(–) 281, Chicago, IL
10—SONNY SIAKI
(–) 236, Miami, FL

JAPAN

1—KENTA KOBASHI
(2) 282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
2—TOSHIAKI KAWADA
(1) 245, Ashikaga, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown champion
3—HIROYOSHI TENZAN
(4) 270, Tokyo, Japan
4—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA
(3) 231, Tokyo, Japan
5—JUN AKIYAMA
(–) 225, Hiroshima, Japan
6—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA
(5) 270, Sapporo, Japan
7—KEIJI MUTO
(10) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
8—SHINYA HASHIMOTO
(6) 287, Gifu, Japan
9—MASA CHONO
(–) 235, Tokyo, Japan
10—JUSHIN LIGER
(–) 222, Hiroshima, Japan

MEXICO

1—MR. NIEBLA
(3) 185, Cualtitlan, Mexico
2—EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(2) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico
3—SHOCKER
(1) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico
4—LA PARK ORIGINAL
(–) 235, Torreon, Mexico
5—OCTAGON
(–) 180, Monterrey, Mexico
6—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(–) 173, Mexico City, Mexico
7—REY BUCANERO
(–) 197, Mexico City, Mexico
8—HEAVY METAL
(–) 180, Mexico City, Mexico
9—ATLANTIS
(10) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico
10—LATIN LOVER
(–) 190, Monterrey, Mexico

ratings analysis

Every month, this column will tell fans how we go about rating over 200 wrestlers in 22 different categories. It is a behind-the-scenes look at the most important–and respected–ratings system in the sport. This column is vital reading for all wrestling fans.

Full-time "Showstopper." Fans of **Shawn Michaels** must be rejoicing upon learning that "The Heartbreak Kid" is feeling so good physically these days that he has agreed to start working basically a full-time schedule in WWE. When he returned for his first WWE match in four-plus years and defeated **Triple-H** in a bloody yet thrilling streetfight at SummerSlam 2002, we hailed it as a miracle comeback, and even advised against him scratching the itch to wrestle even occasionally again for fear of what might happen to his surgically repaired back.

Shawn Michaels

But as he began to appear at most *Raws*, a good number of pay-per-views, and even a house show now and then, we wondered if his back really was feeling a lot better and could take the pounding. His performances were just so good. The old HBK looked like he was back. As time went on, he started appearing at almost every *Raw* and more than just a house show or two per month.

So now he's a full-timer again.

Whereas Michaels' last Raw title reign was basically a one-month-long nostalgia trip, we now believe that a more significant reign is in his future. As pointed out by Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker in "In Focus" on page 16, Michaels is one of those fairly rare wrestlers who can pull good matches out of wrestlers of all shapes, sizes, styles, and levels of experience. He looks almost as comfortable in the ring with **Kane**, **Batista**, and **Mark Henry** as he does with Triple-H, **Chris Jericho**, and **Rob Van Dam**. That makes him a valuable member of any roster and an ideal candidate to be champion. It doesn't hurt that he is still extremely popular.

You'll notice that Michaels' name has crept back into the overall Top 10 in this issue (all the way up to number four!). Don't expect that to be the last time you see his name on that list. In fact, *do* expect to see his name at the top of the Top 10 sooner rather than later. Whether it's Triple-H or someone else on the Raw roster holding that big title, Michaels always has an eye on the gold.

The forgotten developmental. A lot of Ohio Valley Wrestling fans were stunned in January when **Nick Dinsmore** defeated **Johnny Jeter** for the vacant OVW heavyweight title. It was no shock that Dinsmore grabbed the gold, mind you. He had done so eight times previously (**Flash Flanagan** ranks a distant second in OVW history with four reigns). What was shocking was that Dinsmore, a fan favorite for most of his tenure in the promotion, turned heel in order to do so.

Nick Dinsmore

Dinsmore has been wrestling as well as ever and could have beaten the less-experienced Jeter on his own merits, but he chose to form an alliance with the despised **Inspector Impact** to secure the title. Nevertheless, we felt Dinsmore earned a spot in the Top 10 in this issue, and thus you see his name at number 10.

But apparently WWE is still not yet convinced that Dinsmore, who is under developmental contract, is a major league superstar, as it even ran a story on its Web site speculating about whether he'd ever make it in the big time. Look at all the other developmental prospects that made the jump to WWE before him. **Brock Lesnar**, **Randy Orton**, Batista, **Rico**, **John Cena** … and the list goes on. **The Basham Brothers** were thought to be solid if unspectacular prospects in OVW, and they were enjoying a lengthy run as Smackdown tag champs at press time. Even *Tough Enough* alumni **Maven**, **Nidia**, **Matt Morgan**, **Jackie Gayda**, and **Shaniqua** have advanced.

OVW promoter **Jim Cornette** has always thought highly of Dinsmore (hence the nickname "Mr. Wrestling") and would love to see him get more than just an occasional match on a WWE house show. He would hate to lose his services and experience in OVW, but he'd be happy to see him move on to bigger and better things. And Dinsmore might just surprise **Vince McMahon** and company if he ever got that elusive opportunity. Something tells us Dinsmore would gladly give up his spot in our Top 10 as OVW champ for a chance to earn a spot anywhere in the Raw or Smackdown rankings. For now, though, all he can do is hope that the call finally does come.

That's all we have! As always, if you have any comments regarding our ratings or what you see here, we'd love to hear from you. Write to: "Ratings Analysis," c/o *PWI*, Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. □

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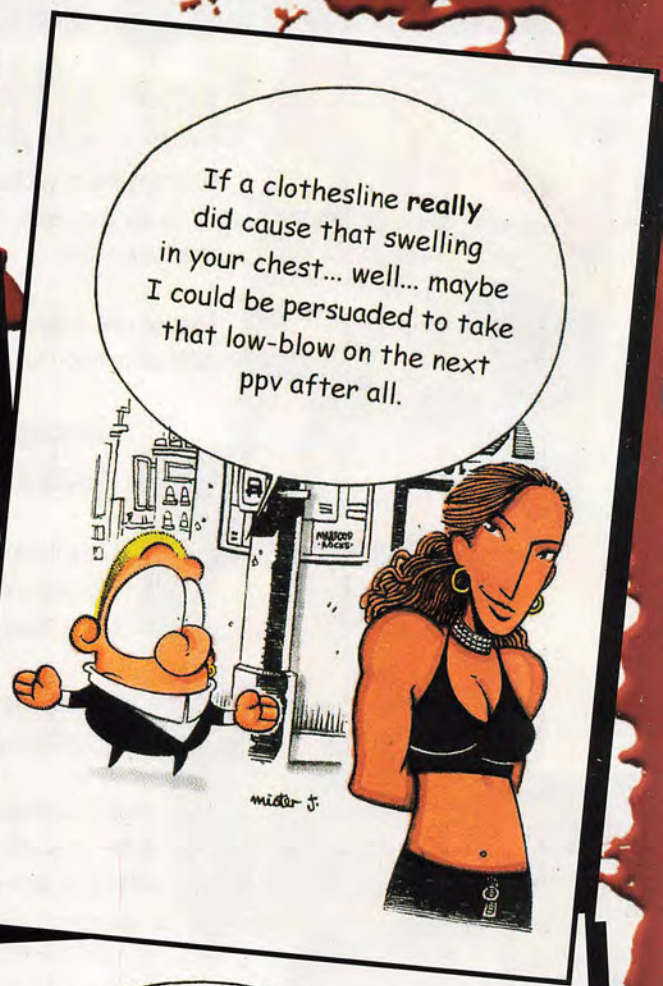
Drawing Blood

By Jason Conlan

I don't know what surprises me more Nathan... the fact that you jumped from the Fed, or the fact that you had a chance to before you were pushed...
mister j.


If a clothesline **really** did cause that swelling in your chest... well... maybe I could be persuaded to take that low-blow on the next ppv after all.
mister j.

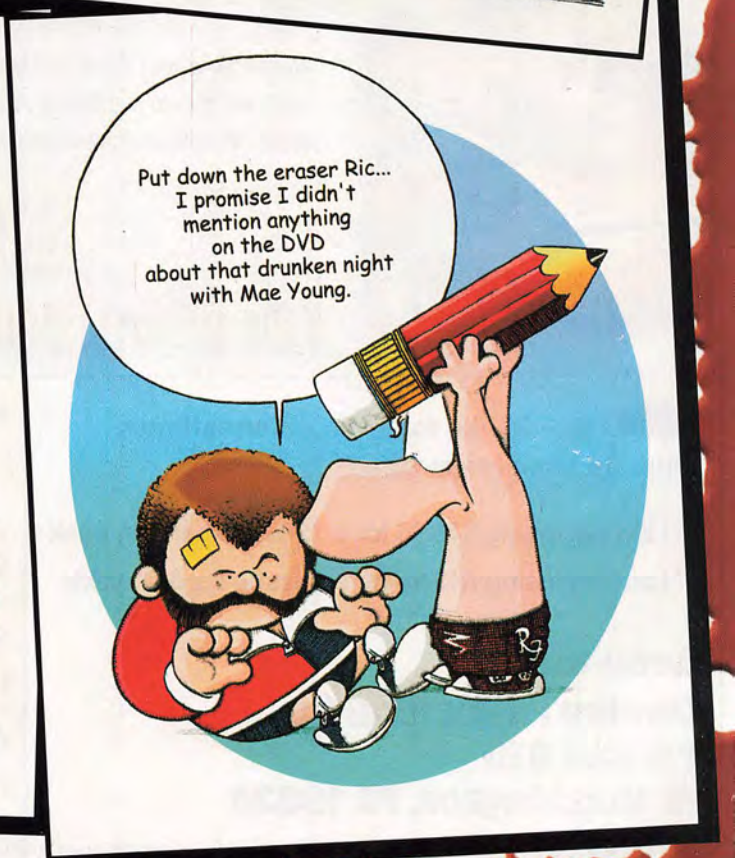


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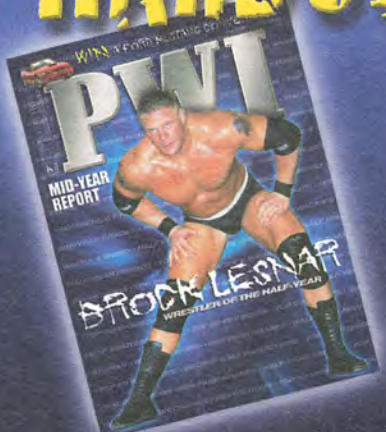
Photo by Duane Long

HARDCORE SAVINGS



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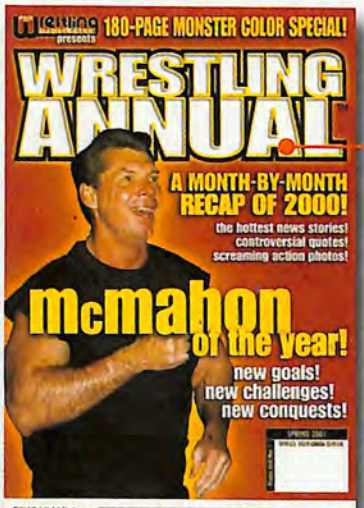

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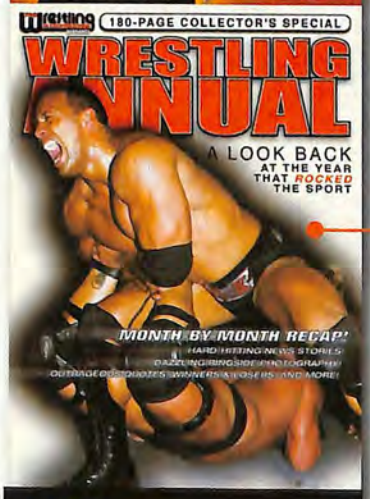

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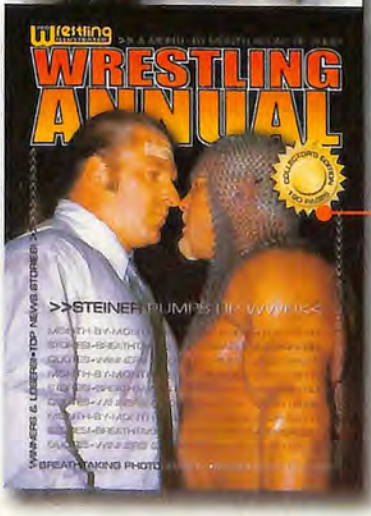

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